



**Briefing Note:** *Our Kind of School* project update for the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministerial Group

<b>To:</b>	Hon Jan Tinetti, Associate Minister of Education		
<b>Cc:</b>	Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education		
<b>Date:</b>	13 May 2021	<b>Priority:</b>	Medium
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### Summary

- This briefing provides an update on the *Our Kind of School* project to support discussion at the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministerial Group meeting on 17 May 2021. It includes a short summary of findings from engagements at five schools which were identified as doing well at creating safe, inclusive environments that prevent bullying.
- We recommend you forward this briefing to your Ministerial colleagues in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Ministerial Group.

### Proactive Release

**Agree** that this briefing will **not** be proactively released at this time until the final project report has been publicly released by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Ministry of Education.

☒ **Agree** ☐ **Disagree**



Dr Andrea Schöllmann  
**Deputy Secretary**  
**Education System Policy**

13/05/2021



Hon Jan Tinetti  
**Associate Minister of Education**

16/05/2021

## Background

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1. The Ministry of Education has partnered with the Office of the Children's Commissioner (OCC) on the *Our Kind of School* project. This project aims to strengthen our understanding of how schools and kura can provide safe, inclusive environments that are free from bullying. We commenced this work in October 2020 and we expect to provide a final report to you by the end of May 2021. We provided you with a short update on the project in April 2021 [METIS 1257422 refers].
2. To inform discussions at the next Child and Youth Wellbeing Ministerial Group meeting, we have included a summary of project findings from engagements (see Annex 1). This work aligns with the desired outcome of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy that *children and young people are accepted, respected and connected*.
3. The cross-sector Bullying Prevention Advisory Group (BPAG) has been involved with this work from its outset. We will continue to discuss this project with BPAG. The project helps to progress some of the actions identified in the BPAG Work Programme 2019-2022. The Education Review Office (ERO) was also involved from the outset of this work and provided support with the initial stages. Findings from the project will complement research, evaluations and reports from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) and ERO<sup>1</sup> relating to effective approaches to bullying prevention, by providing on-the-ground examples of steps schools and communities can take to achieve this.

### **We drew on findings from data and previous engagement to inform this project**

4. To inform our project, we looked at what we already knew about bullying prevention. We have reviewed previous engagements to reflect on what we heard about bullying. We focused on findings relating to barriers and enablers – factors that were identified as helping or hindering efforts to address bullying. We reviewed four Ministry-led engagements and OCC also reviewed some of their previous engagements.
5. We also looked at data on bullying in Aotearoa. A summary of recent data findings is included in the report *He Whakaaro: What do we know about bullying behaviours in New Zealand?*<sup>2</sup> This includes some indicative findings about the types of bullying behaviours that are most frequent, and which groups of our children and young people are more likely to experience bullying.
6. The Ministry conducted a scan of the resources available to support bullying prevention and response, as well as inclusion more broadly, in schools and kura. Most of these resources are written and may not all be engaging or easily accessible for school staff.
7. We looked at research and evidence, which shows that the most successful approaches to bullying prevention in schools and kura involve students, staff, whānau and communities working together.<sup>3</sup> They focus on a broad range of social and environmental factors that foster positive, caring and inclusive cultures. These whole school approaches take time to embed and sustain but deliver benefits beyond bullying prevention, such as increasing engagement and reducing racism and discrimination.
8. Although we know what works at a high level to create a good school environment that prevents bullying, we wanted to engage with some schools to better understand the key enablers, barriers and practical steps schools are taking to achieve this.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the ERO report *Bullying Prevention and Response: Student Voice* available at: <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/bullying-prevention-and-response-student-voice>.

<sup>2</sup> This report is available at: <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/series/he-whakaaro/he-whakaaro-what-do-we-know-about-bullying-behaviours-in-new-zealand>.

<sup>3</sup> More information about effective whole-school approaches to bullying is available at: <https://www.bullyingfree.nz/preventing-bullying/the-nine-elements-of-an-effective-whole-school-approach-to-preventing-and-responding-to-bullying/>.

### **We engaged with four schools and one kura to describe good practice**

9. Between October and December 2020, our joint OCC and Ministry project team engaged with a kura kaupapa Māori and four primary schools. These schools were identified as doing well at creating safe, inclusive environments which help to prevent bullying.
10. The four schools were identified by NZCER as having positive trends in their Wellbeing@School data results. The Wellbeing@School toolkit includes student and teacher surveys that help schools to review whether they are effectively providing a safe and caring climate. The student surveys include questions about bullying. The kura was identified as being engaged and effective at implementing Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) and regional staff confirmed it would provide a good practice example.
11. We engaged with 250+ students (predominantly in years 5-8), approximately 70 staff members, and 45+ whānau and community members. We included some of the phrasing from the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy in our engagement questions. Engagements explored how the whole school, including staff, students, whānau and the wider community, work together to ensure everyone feels accepted, respected and connected at school. We heard some great examples of what good practice looks like.

### **Full findings from the engagements will be shared in a project report**

12. We recently finished analysing findings from these engagements and are in the process of finalising a report sharing our findings. This will be a fulsome document that includes overall insights across all five schools and summaries of the engagements we undertook in each school/kura. Although we are finalising how this is presented, the attached notes are a high-level summary of the content and key findings in this report (see Annex 1).
13. In addition to this written report, we also plan to share key findings, including examples of good practice, through a range of other channels. We know that staff, school leaders, whānau and students may have different preferences when it comes to accessing information. For example, a video clip outlining a practical example to try out in the classroom might be most engaging for teachers. We are planning how we best communicate findings to inspire schools and communities to try out new approaches.

### **Bullying prevention programmes did not feature in our engagements**

14. Throughout our engagements at five schools, we did not hear about any specific bullying prevention programmes being used. Bullying programmes often receive media coverage and there is a perception that these are a discrete solution to address bullying in schools. However, evidence for the effectiveness of bullying programmes is variable. Because they tend to focus in on bullying, these programmes do not always help schools work with their communities on holistic approaches to build positive environments, shared values, attitudes and expectations.
15. Some schools use programmes to complement their overarching approaches, but schools can take successful approaches to prevent bullying without using these programmes, as we saw at the schools and kura we engaged with. Some broader initiatives and supports, such as the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) suite, Social Workers in Schools and Learning Support Coordinators were mentioned as contributing to the success of some of the schools involved.

### **Next steps**

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16. Before the end of May 2021, we plan to share the full *Our Kind of School* project report with you. Following this, and communications with the schools involved, we plan to release this publicly.
17. The findings from this report will help inform broader work on bullying prevention. We also plan to share the findings of the report in a range of other ways, to make good

practice examples accessible to a range of audiences, including teachers. For example, this could include through seminars, social media, and video clips. We will advise you as planning to share project findings progresses.

18. We have worked closely with OCC throughout this project, including providing feedback on initial drafts of the full report and seeking review of this update. We will continue to work closely together on the *Our Kind of School* project.

## Annexes

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Annex 1: “*Our Kind of School* findings”

Proactively Released

## Annex 1: *Our Kind of School* findings

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The Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Ministry of Education partnered on the *Our Kind of School* project. In 2020, we visited five schools including a mix of full and contributing primary schools, and a kura kaupapa Māori. These schools were identified as doing effective things to create safe, inclusive environments that help to prevent bullying. While the schools had similarities in their approaches, each implemented these in unique ways that worked for the local context of their students, their whānau, and wider school community.

Common themes we identified across the schools and kura included:

### **Strong and respectful school leadership lays foundations for a positive school culture**

- The leaders at all the schools built relationships, and are well known, trusted and approachable, including for students, staff, whānau and in the wider community.
- They took a continuous improvement and inquiry process approach to change and are open to ideas from students, whānau and staff on how to improve the school.

### **Focus on getting to know and meeting the needs of each student**

- School staff spent time getting to know students within the context of their whole life and whānau and worked with them to provide whatever support they needed, in their learning and beyond.
- Schools recognised that staff teach, and students learn, in different ways and demonstrated a willingness to accommodate these needs.

### **Commitment to tikanga and te reo Māori in the classroom, culture and school community**

- The schools and kura had structured frameworks and practice that incorporated both tikanga and te reo in different ways into the classroom.
- Some schools had woven the history of local iwi and tīpuna into their teaching.

### **Connecting with and including whānau and wider community in school life**

- There was a strong sense that the schools were at the heart of their communities. Whānau involvement in school is supported. At some schools, whānau work closely with the school on key aspects of learning and decision making, such as curriculum.
- We heard from whānau about the difference it makes when staff spend time getting to know them and communicate regularly about their child's school journey.

### **Quick and effective responses to bullying incidents**

- Bullying was uncommon, but when it did happen, it was followed up quickly and effectively, drawing on the strong relationships between staff, students and whānau.
- Responses focused on finding out the root cause of the behaviour, e.g. unmet student needs, and on restoring relationships between the people involved.

Our research also identified barriers that schools face when trying to create safe and inclusive environments. These often related to insufficient funding and resources.

We agreed to keep the names of the schools and kura involved anonymous, to help establish trust for everyone we engaged with to speak openly and honestly. This included when discussing things were not going so well, or approaches that did not work.

Some findings from the full report on engagements at each of the five schools and kura are summarised below. This includes some key actions that each school took to create safe and inclusive environments that make students feel accepted, respected and connected.

## **Context**

This school is a contributing school (years 1-6) located in the lower North Island with a roll of about 400 children. The student body is ethnically diverse. There are a growing number of disabled students and/or students who receive learning support.

## **Actions the school is taking to make students feel accepted, respected and connected**

- The school fosters strong connections with whānau and the wider community through whānau-led groups which fundraise and put on events.
- Students are supported to undertake activities important to their culture or religion, such as going to the local mosque for Friday prayers.
- There are flexible start times at the beginning of the school day to help students connect with each other and ease into class.
- The school has dedicated free play areas.
- New entrants and year 5/6 students are able to stay in the same class for multiple years, to allow strong relationships to be formed during key transition points.

## **How the school is creating safe, inclusive environments that help to prevent bullying**

Staff teach collaboratively which in turn models a collaborative way of working to children. The collaborative teaching approach, which includes support staff such as teacher aides, enables teachers to spend more time with students who need extra support and to resolve issues more quickly. Furthermore, support staff, including those not in teaching support roles, go above and beyond their role to manaaki and tautoko students. Examples included the caretaker running extracurricular activities for students.

Adults build relationships with students at an individual level and spend time getting to know students within their whole context, enabling them to better meet students' needs. Staff support students to exercise their agency and voice, grounded in respect for them and their individual goals. This includes a strong focus on self-directed learning and providing students with leadership opportunities through a range of student-run initiatives, such as clubs.

The school takes a restorative approach to bullying incidents, with a strong focus on enabling students to resolve issues themselves.

The school is exploring how it draws on and reflects te ao Māori and working on building its general cultural capability. As part of this, staff and students have been learning about the local area through a programme for schools run by local mana whenua. To support this, a number of staff are also upskilling their reo Māori.

## **Context**

This full primary school (years 1-8) is located in the central North Island. There are a mixture of English medium, bilingual Māori and immersion Māori medium classrooms. Close to 500 students attend. Most students are Māori, with a significant number of Pacific students too.

## **Actions the school is taking to make students feel accepted, respected and connected**

- Students and whānau are greeted every day at the school gates by their principal and deputy principal.
- The principal and deputy principal have an open-door policy for children, and they felt free to walk in and out of their offices to chat.
- Tuakana-teina relationships between students are a way students show respect and kindness to each other. Students welcome and greet others, give hugs, include other each other in games, and check on other students who look sad.
- There are formal service and leadership opportunities for students including different councils, monitoring and garden keeping.
- Whānau are a valued and integral part of the school. The school tries to be a support hub by doing things such as dropping off food packages to whānau during lockdown.
- The school reaches out to whānau and communities for involvement in school celebrations, such as language weeks.

## **How the school is creating safe, inclusive environments that help to prevent bullying**

Whānau, whanaungatanga and connection to/through whakapapa formed the foundation of this school, creating an incredible sense of community and trust from whānau. As part of this, the school has deliberately employed whānau members from the school community. The school principal and deputy principal act as parental figures and have whānau connections to students, and model whanaungatanga in their approach to leadership. This is also reflected in trusting and strong connections between staff and students.

The school felt welcoming. Students are greeted when they arrive each morning, and many students greeted us. Students are always welcome in key spaces within the school including the principal's office, deputy principal's office and the staffroom. Students know that they can access the staffroom to get food and to be looked after after school until their whānau can come and pick them up.

The school has an embedded values matrix that was designed by the whole school community. The matrix is displayed in every room and the buildings and playgrounds are painted in its three colours. We heard that children had taken it home and stuck it on the fridge to refer to. Staff also reinforce the messages in the values matrix during teaching. As a result, students hold their whānau and staff accountable to the values.

The school responds to reports of bullying quickly. The students have clear boundaries on acceptable behaviour and stick up for each other. When bullying occurs, students know how to respond. We were told they often mediate disputes amongst themselves. For example, they hold hui and then involve teachers when they felt it necessary. All students know about the paperwork the school completes when bullying occurs, and they help fill out the form which goes to whānau.

## **Context**

This contributing school (year 1-6) is located on the east coast of the South Island. It has approximately 260 students from a range of ethnic backgrounds including Māori, Pacific and Asian. There are a significant number of disabled students and/or students receiving learning support. There are two bilingual English-Te Reo classes. There is an Early Child Education Centre and high school nearby which interact with the school.

## **Actions the school is taking to make students feel accepted, respected and connected**

- Teachers have a range of teaching and learning approaches that are responsive to the needs of individual students; for example, not having mandatory homework, or making lessons relevant to children's interests outside of school.
- Staff support students to know how to treat to each other through role modelling and having strong, supportive relationships with each other.
- Designated student leaders are supported to help resolve minor playground incidents and role play common scenarios that require resolution.
- The diversity amongst students is celebrated through a number of student clubs and community events which whānau get involved with.
- Diversity is also celebrated through practicing karakia, waiata, running cultural groups for the children to participate in, displaying flags of the countries the children are from, and celebrating significant cultural festivals.
- All staff contribute to creating an environment where students feel accepted. Staff in the office, particularly the receptionist, were noted as being welcoming and knowing children and their whānau.

## **How the school is creating safe, inclusive environments that help to prevent bullying**

Staff place importance on building relationships with the children and their whānau and on understanding their wider context in a non-judgemental way. There is a village feel to the school which is supported by regular communication with whānau and a sense that staff are open to resolving issues. The school is considered a "hub" amongst staff and whānau and the wider community.

The school collects and inputs regular data and information about students as part of an ongoing reflective practice to identify areas of concern and implement appropriate support where necessary. This includes providing support with their learning and behaviour, and with basics, such as food, where needed. In addition, at the beginning and end of the year, staff spend time with each other so that they can understand the children that are coming to their class that year. This includes sharing knowledge about their whānau and community which then informs how they are taught and supported.

Staff told us many children at the school have experienced trauma which needs to be addressed before children are ready to learn. The school has a full-time Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO), access to a social worker, shared with two other schools, a Learning Support Coordinator, shared with two other schools, and support from the Mana Ake initiative. The combination of these roles means there is holistic wraparound support available to students and their whānau.



## **Context**

This full primary school (year 1-8) is in a rural community in the North Island. It has a small roll and provides both English medium and Māori medium teaching options with a Rūma Rumaki Reo. There is an Early Childhood Centre behind the school as well as an alternative education unit for high school students on site. Most of the students and staff are Māori.

## **Actions the school is taking to make students feel accepted, respected and connected**

- Te reo Māori is visible in most signage, information posters, and art throughout the school as well as in the students' work. It is heard during classroom lessons as well as in general conversations between the principal, staff, and the students.
- School spaces are open and accessible to students and whānau as valued members of the school community. It was not uncommon for parents to be sitting and watching classes.
- The principal and staff take care to welcome new whānau into the school community.
- Students have opportunities to fully be themselves through involvement with cultural activities, hearing and learning pūrākau and waiata, and participating in kapa haka.
- The school prioritises relationships with students through sharing of kai and facilitating meaningful kōrero with them as they eat.

## **How the school is creating safe, inclusive environments that help to prevent bullying**

There is a strong whānau atmosphere, with the school having a strong commitment to whanaungatanga. Staff are intentional in demonstrating positive and healthy relationships between themselves so that students see and understand how vital it is to have strong connections with each other. They do this through valuing each other as individuals within a collective; respecting each other's positions and roles, utilising strengths and skills of all staff members, and celebrating the diverse lived experiences, values and beliefs of staff.

Students are deliberately centred in the school whānau. Each day staff welcome and support them as individuals. Through sharing and learning of pūrākau and waiata, the students are supported to connect with their community, the environment, and their own whakapapa. The school also strives to embed whānau values that go beyond their school walls by nurturing strong relationships with the wider community.

Kai is a large part of the school culture. The school ensures that students have something to eat while at school. A large veranda area located near the staffroom is used for students to sit with staff and have their lunch, and when whānau are present at the school they will join.

The service-focused leadership approach by the principal has been key to the progress and success of the school. Board members, staff, whānau and wider community members identified the principal as a key role model and inspiration for positive change. In the same spirit the principal is adamant that the positive progress of the school stems from acknowledging and embracing the good and talent inherent in the staff and students. The principal has also worked with her staff to engage students and their whānau, guiding the school on a journey to develop their own tikanga and values.

## **Context**

This kura kaupapa Māori is located in the eastern North Island with approximately 70 students in years 1-8. The kura is strongly connected with the local iwi of the region.

### **Actions the school is taking to make students feel accepted, respected and connected**

- The kura strengthens connections to iwi and marae and promotes the sharing of knowledge between children and kaumatua.
- Whānau are involved in decision making, including through regular hui with staff where they can share ideas, and the kura has an 0800 number for whānau in need.
- Whanaungatanga helps with acceptance and to prevent bullying, including of disabled students, as a lot of students and whānau are related. This strengthens their connections to iwi and each other.
- Students told us they go to Koro Kauri, a tree that is seen as a safe and calming place, if they want to calm their spirit.

### **How the school is creating safe, inclusive environments that help to prevent bullying**

Tikanga and kaupapa Māori are a normal part of kura life and underpin the activities and teaching at kura. Tikanga is taught to children, known by whānau, and was talked about as a way of living that aligns with the kura values.

Time and effort are put into building strong relationships across the kura and into the community. The kura puts a strong emphasis on whanaungatanga and whakapapa which helps to facilitate this. One of the ways this is done is through a tuakana-teina model, where older students look after younger students, which helps build intergenerational connections. Kaiako model positive relationships to children. The principal ensures children and whānau are well supported and has built strong relationships with the community and groups that support the school. The staff encourage whānau participation and consequently, whānau are invested in kura events.

Kaiako (teachers) adapt to suit each student and whānau; in class they take a flexible approach to responding to the individual needs of students, for example if they need a break or to step out of class, kaiako support them to do so.

The kura uses whakairo and ngākau Māori to identify and respond to issues such as bullying. It also uses kāri wātea (calming cards) to allow time and space for children to calm down after something has happened.