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COVER STORY

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Anita Yarwood is the director, or principal, of Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery, a special character school teaching Years 1-13 located at the heart of Christchurch. Learning is personalised and based on students' passions and exploration

FROM THE GM

Issue 145, Term 1 | 2025

This issue of Principals Today features an interview with Anita Yarwood, director of Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery in Christchurch, who discusses the benefits and potential of personalised exploration-based learning.

We also delve into the natural world of education in isolation by talking to Pitt Island school principal Nic Hill.

You'll find articles on the difference neurodivergent educators make, the case for NZSL in every classroom, why school readiness is about more than age, and how to discuss setbacks with students.

There are pieces on encouraging creativity, whether screen time mimics ADHD signs, and we ask if the time has come to ditch school uniforms, plus much more.

Enjoy.

Kylie Palermo

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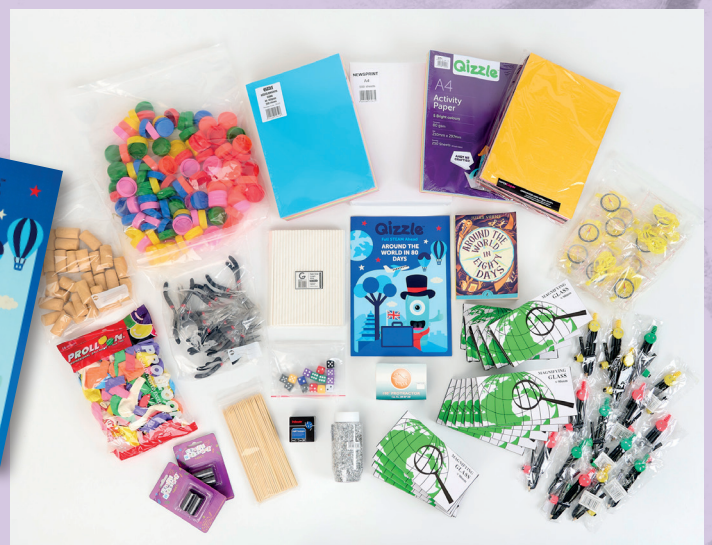
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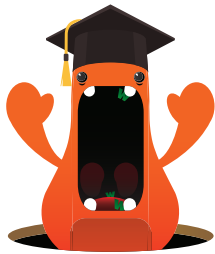


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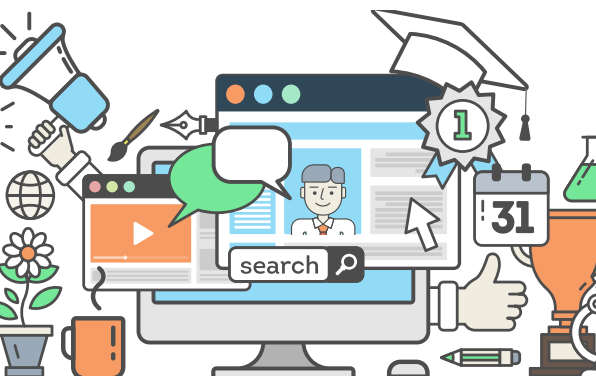
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THE STAFFROOM

Anonymous teacher column

How effective are the induction programs for new teachers in New Zealand? Are these programs providing the necessary support and mentorship to help new teachers succeed?

Not very effective. Graduating teachers feel like they are left to fend for themselves and learn on the job. This is another way in which teaching compares poorly to other professions.

What are the challenges associated with relying heavily on relief teachers who may not be registered or experienced?

The issue is the growing shortage of available relief teachers which leaves schools increasingly desperate in their efforts to ensure that they have an adult in front of students at all times. The problem will only be exacerbated by the extra CRT that was negotiated as part of the last Primary Teachers' Collective Agreement. There is a sense that the bar has been lowered out of necessity.

Are the changes to the education system happening too quickly, without sufficient time for consultation and implementation?

The coalition's changes to education can be seen as no more than a knee-jerk reaction to NZ falling behind other countries in key areas.

Rather than taking the time to investigate the real causes, their response once again makes education a political football.

At the risk of mixing metaphors, students have become guinea pigs in the coalition's experiment. The speed with which they are rolling out the changes adds to the sense of it being experimental and lacking in substance.

The rollout leaves no time for proper research and training.

The approach ignores the needs of individual learners, especially the most vulnerable.

The pressure to make it work will further deter potential teaching candidates, thereby adding to the recruitment and retention problems in the profession.

Adds to recruitment problems - deters potential candidates. Graduates in other areas are paid more.

Are all stakeholders, including teachers, principals, and parents, being adequately involved in the decision-making process regarding education system changes?

No. It is widely publicised that the government relies on input from "think tanks" that do not represent the most important stakeholders. This has led to concerns about a lack of consultation or transparency and adds to the impression that it is an exercise in pushing a political agenda.

How are schools adapting to the rapid pace of change? Are they receiving the necessary resources and support to implement new policies and practices effectively?

Schools are scrambling to enrol teachers into PD programmes.

The budget to buy resources and pay for teacher upskilling is lacking.

With PD providers expected to be vetted by the Ministry it has all become a bit of a lolly scramble. In this scenario, history has shown that the neediest schools with the most vulnerable students often miss out.

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Additionally, the ecocept® pad is made from recycled materials, aligning with the school's sustainability goals and reducing the overall environmental impact of the project. Its durable construction extends the lifespan of the turf system, offering a long-term, cost effective solution for the school's sports facilities.

NRG2

The installation of TigerTurf's NRG2 non-infill turf system at

Ormiston Primary School greatly enhances their sports facilities. Unlike traditional turfs, NRG2 has no stabilizing infill, which extends surface life, reduces maintenance costs, and lowers environmental impact. Developed with PSV Eindhoven football players, this innovative turf combines yarn support with a sports pad for optimal performance.

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*- Mr Heath McNeil
(Leader of Learning)*



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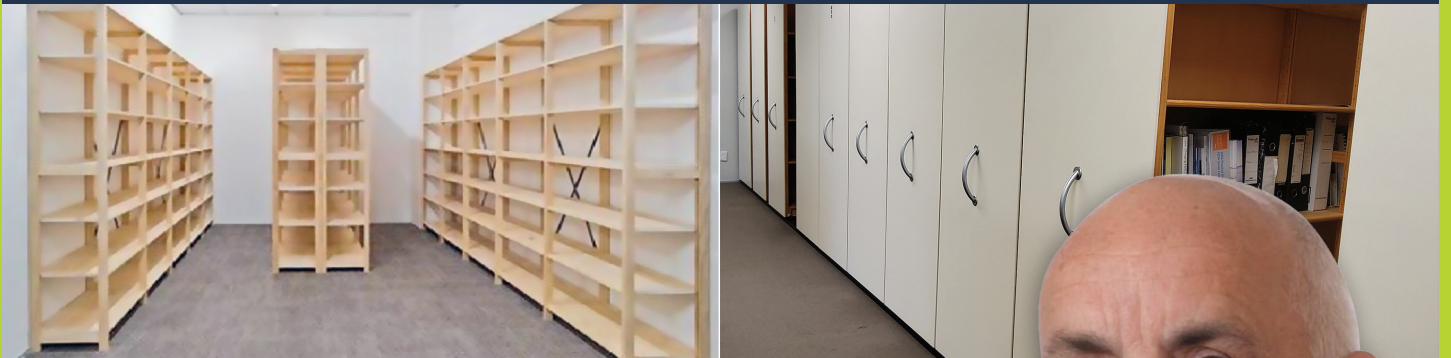
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UNLIMITED LEARNING

Anita Yarwood is the director, or principal, of Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery, a special character school teaching Years 1-13 located at the heart of Christchurch. Learning is personalised and based on students' passions and exploration; she tells Ben O'Connell.





After Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti and Discovery¹ were both destroyed in the 2011 earthquakes, they were merged into one: Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery formed in 2014. The school was split over two sites until the shift to the purpose-built site in 2019. "This building is placed in the central city to support the philosophy of learning without walls," Anita says. "Our students can use the wider city as a classroom."

Students have agency over learning and are encouraged to explore their interests aided by a learning advisor who meets regularly with them and their whānau. Timetables help students personalise their learning, with all subjects at all levels. "Inclusion in a class is determined by the student's interest and understanding of the subject. Subject selection is choice-based. We have a range of learning options for students."

Ao Tawhiti offers traditional NCEA-assessed subjects and Hapori classes that aren't accessed academically but support competency

development, such as volunteering, tramping, biology, sustainability or Māori art at their Climate Action Campus. PINs – passion and interest workshops – are also facilitated. Students in Years 1-6 learn literacy and numeracy in the morning and have self-driven inquiry and project-based learning for the rest of the day.

Senior students can choose Gateway work experience in a range of fields, including neurosurgery and horse dentistry. They can also be enrolled at Ara or complete University of Canterbury courses. Intermediate and senior students can hold a trust licence that allows them to sign in and out of school during the day to use central city resources like Tūranga library, the gym, and the art gallery, or to buy lunch. Offsite learning is another option, popular for students who are also athletes, dancers, horse riders, and gymnasts, to name a few.

What does the average day at Ao Tawhiti look like?

"Inclusion in a class is determined by the student's interest and understanding of the subject. Subject selection is choice-based. We have a range of learning options for students."

The beauty of this school is that there is no average day. We have blanket consent from all our caregivers to take students out into the central city at any time during the school day so our students, staff and caregivers are in and out of the building, taking advantage of spontaneous learning opportunities and working within individualised learning programs. As students get older, the number of compulsory classes that they have to take decreases, so every student's program will look slightly different.

What qualifies a student to be able to attend Ao Tawhiti?

All learners are welcome at Ao Tawhiti, but we have found that students who are successful

are the students who are willing to take an active role in their learning, who have passions and interests that they want to explore, who are confident working in partnership with Learning Advisors and have parents who are able to be involved in their child's education.

What are the biggest misconceptions about our school?

A misconception in education is that learning isn't rigorous unless the content and outcomes are pre-determined by the teacher and quantifiable against a rubric or schedule. Students are deemed successful when they pass standardised tests that they sit at prescribed ages.



At our school, learning is messy and interesting and comes from opportunities and experiences, as well as instructional teaching. Accessing learning outside the traditional classroom doesn't negate the value of the learning. Personalised programs don't stop students from being able to access an NCEA qualification, as evidenced by our results.

69% of our school leavers achieve NCEA Level 3, and this is a 10% increase over the last three years. Our co-requisite results sit above the national average, and our younger students are making excellent progress in developing foundational literacy and numeracy. They also have the confidence and skill set to enter intermediate and secondary education, which are primed for success.

What do you think about charter schools, and how does Ao Tawhiti differ from one?

We aren't a charter school. We are a state-funded area school.

Our special character gives us flexibility over curriculum delivery. However, we work within the same operational and legislative guidelines as any other state school in Aotearoa. I am aware that we are in a privileged position to have the flexibility of a special character school.

Our existing schools are fabulous. The reason that local schools can't always meet every learner's needs often comes from a lack of resources. I would rather see the charter school funding given to existing state schools, who already have a relationship with their communities and are doing a great job.

What do you think are the most important skills for students to have leaving school?

Foundational literacy and numeracy are important. However, I think that capabilities are just as vital as skills. We aim for our school leavers to have the capacity for critical thinking and collaboration. The capacity for

empathy and respect. The ability to view the world through a lens that is bigger than themselves and the resilience to overcome inevitable challenges.

What are your biggest concerns and challenges as an educator?

A challenge that educators face is challenging inequity within the education system. All educators have student needs at the centre of their work, and it is heartbreaking to work within a wider system where the students with the most need are the least prioritised or acknowledged. Culturally responsive professional development, learning and guidance support are fundamental, and these aren't prioritised in government funding. Two examples directly impacting us are the cutting of funding for Te Ahu o te Reo and not having staffing for a Learning Support Coordinator because we were in the wrong tranche of Kāhui Ako, even though 48% of our senior

students are eligible for Special Assessment Conditions.

Funding inequities are enhanced through a narrowing of assessment criteria, as students whose skills and capabilities sit outside standardised assessment are deemed as failing. This is crazy, as all learners are capable of success, and diversity is invaluable. An example is the co-requisite assessments, which students have to pass before they are able to be awarded their NCEA qualification. Students are literate and numerate in a range of ways, as evidenced through naturally occurring examples that are relevant to their lives and culture. Relying on one test to determine eligibility to access a school leaver's qualification short-changes a lot of students, all of whom deserve recognition.

How intense is the educator's role at Ao Tawhiti? How can we better support the well-being of educators?

An educator's role is intense in any educational setting. Kaiako and kaimahi are unsung heroes, spending at least six hours a day navigating the needs of numerous children and young people. They are challenged by external factors that can't always be alleviated within schools and ECEs. However, they can be alleviated by government policies to effectively deal with poverty, systemic racism, mental

Our special character gives us flexibility over curriculum delivery. However, we work within the same operational and legislative guidelines as any other state school in Aotearoa. I am aware that we are in a privileged position to have the flexibility of a special character school.

health challenges, eco-anxiety and so on. If governments could work beyond a three-year election cycle and invest in long-term systemic change so all children come to school feeling secure and ready to learn, then educators could focus on teaching and learning instead of having to be social support workers first and educators second.

The government could also better support educators by trusting their professional judgement around effective teaching and learning so that curriculum design, pedagogy and resource prioritisation are based on the voice of the educators doing the work inside the classroom, as they are the experts in their own field.

How high are attendance rates, and how self-driven is a student's learning?

Because we have a range of learning opportunities that sit outside traditional classroom

We have a range of students, some of whom are fully engaged and self-driven. These students take advantage of opportunities and work hard to create their own learning programs

learning, we measure students' attendance through their engagement in a learning program. We have students who are working in the building and can be marked as present as they attend their curriculum classes. We also have students who are offsite learning and these students have to show evidence of their learning before they are marked as present. We have an ongoing tension between running flexible programs while still being held to account within a fixed model.

We have a range of students, some of whom are fully engaged

and self-driven. These students take advantage of opportunities and work hard to create their own learning programs. We also have students who are second-chance learners who find our school culture an adjustment, as they aren't used to the freedom that we offer. We have students who struggle to find intrinsic motivation or are still working out what they are interested in exploring. We work hard to support all our students in achieving success.

Is there anything else you wish to mention?

I feel very proud and privileged to be the Tumuaki of Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery. I am fortunate to work with wonderful staff, students and caregivers in a unique educational context. I am proud of the work we are doing to future-proof our young people, with a focus on the development of capabilities and our willingness to support students to lead their own learning.

We have a student initiative fund where students can apply for funds to support their projects. We lead a satellite campus called the Climate Action Campus Ōtautahi. This is a campus that gives young people and children the skills to challenge the negative impact of climate change. Our kaupapa is to enable the child to be at the centre of their learning, and we aim to achieve this by operating a high-trust and flexible space where we underpin personalised programs with foundational learning.

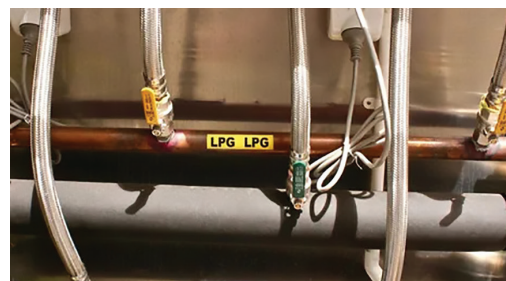


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Navigating change and transitions

Need some help to prepare for the new curriculum? It's a big change. Here are some tips from Fair Way who are specialists in training and resolving conflict in the education sector.

Curriculum changes are a source of tension. While change is inevitable, it's often the transitions that trip us up. Understanding how to manage these can make a difference.

"Bridges' Model of Transition"¹ provides a framework that supports people through change by acknowledging its phases. By applying this model, educators can turn change into an opportunity for growth:

- 1 Ending:** This phase involves acknowledging the end before letting go. It's natural to experience a sense of loss or even resistance.

School leaders should provide spaces where teachers can reflect on the end of the old NCEA curriculum and what they're leaving behind, and express their emotions.

- 2 Neutral Zone:** This includes uncertainty and ambiguity while between the old and the new. It might feel uncomfortable, but it also presents an opportunity for exploration.

Schools can support teachers by providing guidance on implementing the curriculum and opportunities for collaboration. Peer support groups and mentorship programs can help educators share ideas and strategies on how to adapt teaching styles.

- 3 New Beginning:** People start to embrace the new with a sense of purpose. There might still be some ambivalence but creating a plan for the transition and defining clear roles can help with expectations and feeling secure.

Teachers will begin integrating the curriculum, developing new routines, experimenting with teaching methods, and finding what works best for their students. Celebrating small successes and acknowledging progress is important. Continuous feedback and professional development will be crucial in helping teachers feel confident.

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Encourage creativity, don't limit it

Recently I visited with Envico in Tauranga. If you haven't heard of them, they're two Kiwis developing drone technologies in their garage.

That Kiwi way of doing innovation has seen them spearheading an aerial baiting project in the Galapagos islands and leading to the world's first successful eradication of invasive rat species using drones.

You may be wondering how this links to education. Their story

is one of creativity, ingenuity, entrepreneurship and Kiwis punching above their weight on the world stage. They saw a global issue and developed a solution to fix it.

I've always been proud as a New Zealander to hear stories like this one and as a former principal I was proud of a curriculum that nurtured our Kiwi number eight wire ingenuity.

But, the current Government's recent changes to our curriculum to focus on literacy and mathematics is



Hon Jan Tinetti – List MP

I'm worried for our young people when I heard the Prime Minister Christopher Luxon say in a recent media interview that he is prepared to see schools deferring arts and music curriculum to raise achievement in maths and reading.

killing our ability to nurture the ability to think differently.

Now before I go any further, I want to reiterate how important literacy and mathematics are. When I was Minister of Education, I released a strategy to address issues we have been facing as a system in these areas and we were working with the sector on developing a curriculum to give more consistency across the country while retaining local flavour. One important part of this strategy was to ensure our wide curriculum balanced rich academic knowledge with arts and other creative subjects that also teach important life skills.

We've already seen the damage of what can happen to our system when there is a sole focus on literacy and numeracy. The failed policy of national standards narrowed our curriculum to a point where curiosity and creativity weren't encouraged, and we started to see a drop-off in our international rankings for education. Unfortunately, Erica Stanford hasn't learned from the failed National Party experiments of the

past and is taking us back down the same path.

I'm worried for our young people when I heard the Prime Minister Christopher Luxon say in a recent media interview that he is prepared to see schools deferring arts and music curriculum to raise achievement in maths and reading.

I'm worried for our teachers when I see professional development offerings through the Ministry of Education narrow to literacy and mathematics.

Adding this all up, it looks like the Government wants to dumb down our curriculum and to limit teachers' ongoing education to solely focus on a narrow and limited view of the world.

When we fail to nurture a child's ability to imagine and create, we fail to help them see the world differently. We fail to help them imagine themselves as the problem solvers that can punch above their weight on the global stage. We need to encourage thinking differently – not remove the ability for young people to do so.



NCEA benefits undermined by politics

Secondary teachers have been the guardians of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) over many years, and can see its undoubted benefits for students, writes Chris Abercrombie.

As a standards-based assessment system that is based on the principle that all students should have opportunities to succeed, be rewarded for what they know and can demonstrate and fulfil their potential, NCEA has clear advantages over the previous norm-referenced qualification system, which had a built-in failure rate.

NCEA better reflects contemporary educational practices and skills required in the modern world and provides more flexibility in terms of subject choices and assessment methods, allowing students to tailor their education to

their interests and strengths. NCEA incorporates continuous assessment throughout the year, rather than relying solely on final exams and recognises a broader range of skills and competencies, including practical and vocational skills, which are important for many career paths. NCEA is a more inclusive qualification, providing multiple pathways for students with different learning preferences and abilities, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

NCEA has however, rarely been free of controversy, nor has the path of implementation been smooth. Change is endemic in education, and teachers do not expect it to be otherwise. But the two tests for change always need to be whether it is justified by the evidence and implemented properly. In many cases, these two tests are not met.

The NCEA review, which began in 2018, has five guiding principles that define a strong qualification:

wellbeing, equity and inclusion, coherence, pathways and credibility.

The review aimed to make our senior secondary qualification more robust, consistent, inclusive and accessible for students of all abilities and backgrounds. The provisional new NCEA Level 1 subject list was designed as part of the Education Ministry's response to support the vision for NCEA as a broad, foundational qualification at Level 1, with further opportunities for specialisation at Levels 2 and 3.

Unfortunately, the NCEA change package has not been well implemented. The new NCEA Level 1 is a cause of particular concern with the recurring problems of resourcing, time for implementation, and the dubious quality of Ministry and Qualifications Authority change management processes.

It is a serious concern that NCEA has become a political football. Students' and parents' confidence

It is a serious concern that NCEA has become a political football. Students' and parents' confidence in the qualifications system is being undermined.

in the qualifications system is being undermined. There should be a broad consensus among politicians that our standards-based qualifications system is what New Zealand is committed to having, and the Government must ensure that ours is the very best system that can be developed and that it is implemented well. Our students deserve nothing less.



Chris Abercrombie is president of PPTA Te Wehengarua

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Disengaged and violent youth

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New Zealand Police are proud to partner with schools on many goals related to safe environments and safe children.

New Zealand Police have been formally involved with schools since the 1930s, from school traffic safety patrols to crime prevention, road safety, and other matters.

Inspector Rob Sum, Manager of Schools and Youth Partnerships, stated Police are aware that for our children and young people, disengagement from education can result in significantly diminished opportunities. It has been found to be an indicator of potential violence later in life, as well as delinquency, substance abuse, suicidal risk, unemployment, and early parenting.

“We are aware that absences can sometimes be tied to health

problems or mental health issues, or can be connected to a parent’s own negative educational experiences.”

“We partner with schools to help prevent harm caused by crime and crashes that will affect student’s achievements, as well as provide a response service to support a school’s usual disciplinary and behaviour management practices when a serious crime is committed.

“Many of you are probably familiar with the roles School Community Officers (SCOs) play. While these specialist police officers are our experts who are the most visible in the school community, there are other police who may become involved, such as Youth Aid Officers, who may be involved to address offending by young people in the school environment,” Inspector Sum says.

Youth Aid work with schools to prevent reoffending of children and young people, under the provisions of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. They work with schools to facilitate restorative justice in the Police-school partnership.

Community Constables are another group who may assist and engage with schools about local issues that affect the learning community.

Inspector Rob Sum said Police support a range of education programmes and services many of you are probably familiar with, across a range of themes such as Keeping Ourselves Safe, Successful Relationships, Travelling Safely, Responsible Citizens, Healthy Body Healthy Mind, and Living in a Safe Community.

“This is a great opportunity to remind Principals of your SCO’s ability to work with you to identify issues and plan responses to address and

“We are aware that absences can sometimes be tied to health problems or mental health issues, or can be connected to a parent’s own negative educational experiences.”

mitigate. SCOs will seek to work with schools to reinforce school approaches. They may have some guidance on resources and /or links with partner agencies,” said Inspector Sum.

Police recommend sharing any concerns with your SCO to ensure a collaborative, consistent and mutually reinforcing response to the challenges of disengaged or disruptive young people in your school.



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quality equipment often see higher participation rates in sports programs, fostering a more active and vibrant school community.

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Schools known for their excellent sports programs and facilities attract more students and gain a positive reputation in the community. High-quality sports equipment is a key component of this success, showcasing the school's commitment to providing the best for its students.



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EDUCATION IN ISOLATION

Schooling the next generation of Pitt Islanders

By Paige O'Brien

45 minutes into the future, there is a small group of eleven islands, ranging in size from just a few hectares to the main island being just over 920 square kilometres.

Being New Zealand's most easterly territory, the Chatham Islands are located 860km east of Christchurch and are home to around 650 Kiwis, with 40 or so of those living on Pitt Island, the Chatham Islands second-largest island.

Amongst the rocky coast and stunning natural environment of Pitt Island, is their local school, which currently has a roll of eight.

Principal of Pitt Island School, Nic Hill talks about the opportunities their ākonga are exposed to that utilises their natural settings, adaptive learning, and how it takes a village.

Tell me a bit about Pitt Island School!

We are a wee kura of eight ākonga, in a very isolated, extremely remote and unique setting, in the middle of Te-Moana-nui-a-kiwa. We are a NZ kura so we have the same expectations of literacy and numeracy. The experiences that our ākonga have outside of school are what epitomises life on Pitt. From catching eels, goose egg hunting in kayaks, gathering paua by hand off the rocks or jumping off the wharf. Along with ensuring there is enough firewood for cooking, hot water and heating. Lambs need feeding and the milking cow needs to be milked. There are always horses or motorbikes to ride. The weekend escapades that are retold on a Monday morning would leave many questioning their validity. Our Pitt Island community is extremely supportive of our ākonga in both their learning and achievements.



Do all the pupils learn in the same space? If so, how do you run that?

We have one classroom at our kura. In that space we have Year 1 to Year 7 currently. Differentiation is key. It is unsustainable to have eight different learning programmes running concurrently. We have our term inquiry planned and all ākonga access the learning

according to their needs. Sometimes our younger ākonga are the ones who have picked up the details in oral text, so there is no discrimination because of age. Tuakana/teina is thriving in our kura. Our big buddies have been trained and know what is expected from them when they work with their younger buddy. They all love the opportunity to work with each other.

How much do you utilise the outdoors into education?

We try to work alongside our community and give back where possible. With the pool out of action, swimming lessons have taken place in Flowerpot Bay, down by the wharf. Long jump practice also takes place on the beach in the best sandpit in the world. This is one area we are trying to develop. We have a couple of beekeepers that we are working alongside to learn how to keep bees. We are developing bee friendly gardens and expanding our orchard to increase the variety of fruit we have growing. We currently have numerous apple trees, a couple of pear trees, and some plum trees. We have recently planted feijoas that were donated by Port Nicholson Fisheries.

What opportunities do you think the pupils of Pitt Island School are more exposed to compared to an urban primary school with a large roll of students?

They (the ākonga) are really involved in the learning programme. Their interests drive the planning and the teaching is extremely adaptive based on their needs and successes. There is continuity in their learning. I know what they learned last year and what they need to learn next. We are the village that it takes to raise a child. We all know each other's strengths/weaknesses and also likes/dislikes.

What does the transition into high school look like for the pupils?

All of our ākonga go to boarding school in NZ. The high school



Principal Nic Hill (bottom right), Release Teacher Bronwyn Henderson (adult in back with blue sweatshirt), four supportive parents, Eileen, Ryan, Tash, Amy and all of the Pitt Island School ākonga, pictured at the Combined Chatham Island Schools Cross Country, at Te One School, 2024.

they go to depends on where they have whānau in NZ. Planes go directly to Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland from the Chathams so invariably they are close to these centres. Our ship services ports in Timaru and Napier so often schools in these areas are popular with whānau. Years ago, 'Weka Walk' was established to reduce the culture/social shock of being in a large city in NZ, as some tamariki had never been off Pitt/Chatham Islands until they left to go to high school. Weka Walk would take Year 7 students to visit boarding hostels, catch public transport, go to the bank and the supermarket. The objective of Weka Walk was to familiarise the student with getting around town confidently.

If your school was gifted \$5000, what would you do with it?

We would take a school trip to the Chathams, by boat or plane, and hire a van, so our ākonga could go to the shop and buy an ice cream and some fruit. We would go visit all the playgrounds on the Chathams so our ākonga can play with other kids of their own age/gender.

In your opinion, what do you think is the student's favourite part of school?

Playing together and being with each other in the classroom and the playground. A lot of our ākonga are related to each other and others quickly become part of the whānau. We have hot lunch on Fridays as an incentive to come to school and it is often

the only time our ākonga have hot chips, hotdogs, and pies. Pie day Friday is always a highlight of the week!!

The people who work at the school and the community are important ingredients in making our wee kura so special. We have no kindergarten or preschool here so new families are welcomed into our school whānau and quickly become part of the community. We often do not see a boat or plane for weeks, if not months in the winter, so it is really important to stay connected with each other. In summer it is the spectacular scenery that keeps you going and in winter it is the comradery of the community that keeps you smiling till the sun next comes out.



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SHOULD WE DITCH SCHOOL UNIFORMS?

By Ben O'Connell

The new year means glossy new stationery, new timetables to adjust to, and for some, costly new uniforms. As the cost-of-living grows, does the case for ditching school uniforms mount as well?

Up-front costs can range from a few hundred bucks to over \$1000 and even higher for private schools. Not to mention that the rapid growth of children can make it costly to replace uniforms often.

Some schools offer financial support to families who

need help to buy uniforms, while others go for second-hand uniforms bought from the community.

Should mufti day be every day then? They aren't necessarily the cheaper option if students are happy to go without labels. The cost of wearing the latest trends quickly adds up.

Johanna Reidy lectures public health at the University of Otago. She says that uniforms should encourage school attendance and not be a barrier.

Johanna says that we should step back and think about why uniforms were instituted in



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the first place: to make access to education easier for students who generally didn't have much. Yet the growing cost of uniforms is now stopping kids getting to school, so she says it's time for change.

The research she's been involved with focuses on the impact of uniforms on education and health. It shows there's a place for school uniforms but they need to be less complex to minimise cost.

"It can be a very simple one that helps reduce distractions and helps students settle to task," she told RNZ's Morning Report.

Beyond costs, school uniforms offer limited opportunities for self-expression. The flip side is that this encourages equality among students and reduces visible socioeconomic differences. It's called a uniform for a reason.

Further, the school uniform creates a sense of school identity and pride, and helps

to simplify the morning rush by giving us one less decision to make while we wipe the sleep out of our eyes.

In New Zealand, it's the school boards that determine the rules around uniforms. Ethically speaking, these boards should ensure that school uniforms don't create undue costs that prove barriers to education.

Johanna says that it's time for the government to intervene more to improve access to uniforms and education. In the UK, the Education Act 2021 outlines that most uniform items should be available from any shop and not just certain retailers. This keeps authorities in check and gives the British government a baseline grasp of how much uniforms cost.

Schools must also check their uniform still serves the needs of students and the community. Are blazers necessary? How have student needs changed? Is the climate the same? Should schools let students decide what garments from

If students are in a good headspace and are physically active, they're better placed to learn.

the uniform they can wear? How does the school uniform support students no matter their gender? These are all important questions to ask.

"The research shows we can do better both in terms of school uniform design and in developing policies about how uniform is worn and by whom," Johanna said.

"It highlights that instead of talking about whether uniforms are good or bad, it's time to reimagine them to address physical and mental comfort for everyone. If students are in a good headspace and are physically active, they're better placed to learn.

"Restrictive school uniforms are limiting physical activity by

girls and creating a barrier to lunch time play, and the style of school uniforms and the lack of warmth is making female students reluctant to cycle to and from school. It can come down to not wanting to cycle to school or play on the jungle gym for fear of inadvertently flashing your knickers.

"If we compel students to wear uniforms, they should promote wellbeing and allow students to thrive. A school whose uniform policy insists students wear shorts in the middle of winter or summer uniforms in an unseasonably cold snap is really old fashioned and out of step with the values that people have now and what we know about education and learning."

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Teaching beyond the stereotypes

How neurodivergent educators are changing the narrative in schools

By Jamie Quinn

Diversity is often discussed in terms of students, but it's just as important to consider the teachers, too. Neurodivergent teachers, like those with ADHD, bring unique strengths and challenges to their roles. Supporting these educators is vital to creating classrooms where everyone can thrive. One teacher with ADHD, who prefers to stay anonymous, explained how schools and the education system can better support neurodivergent staff.

The teacher's journey into education was far from straightforward. Reflecting on their school experiences, they shared, "My own schooling wasn't a positive experience. I was always the 'naughty child' who nobody wanted to see on their class list." Diagnosed as "hyperactive" at seven, they were labelled as "bad" or "stupid" in a system that valued conformity over individuality. They were told they would likely "grow out of it by adolescence," but that didn't happen. Social immaturity and challenges with focus followed

them into their teens. Despite these struggles, they pursued teaching in their 30s, driven by a desire to ensure their students felt seen and supported in ways they hadn't. "Having believed that many of my teachers didn't like me, it was important for me to have good relationships with my students," they said.

For years, they strived to maintain a classroom where compliance was the gold standard, believing it was the sign of a great teacher. However, in 2017, an article about adult ADHD changed their perspective.

"It described the issues with focus and executive dysfunction that I had been struggling with for years in perfect detail," they explained. A diagnosis followed, but at first, it didn't reshape their teaching style. Their initial understanding of ADHD was shaped by outdated stereotypes, such as the idea that it primarily affected boys or could be "fixed" with medication. Over time, however, their understanding deepened, especially through postgraduate studies and their role as a Resource Teacher for Learning and Behaviour (RTLb). Reflecting on this growth, they said, "I wish my eyes had been opened to this decades ago!"

One of the most significant challenges facing neurodivergent teachers is the lack of adequate training on neurodiversity during teacher education. "During my teacher training, if there was any mention of ADHD or neurodiversity, it might have been in a single

lecture," they said. This minimal exposure leaves teachers ill-equipped to meet the needs of neurodivergent students and colleagues. Neurodiversity is increasingly recognised as a key issue in modern classrooms, yet professional development for educators lags behind. The teacher suggested that teacher training programs should dedicate more time to this area, noting that better-prepared educators can support both neurodivergent and neurotypical students. "When teachers have the right skills and tools, not only are they better equipped to support neurodivergent students, but the cognitive and emotional capacity that would free up would benefit their own mental health as well as the neurotypical students in the class."

For neurodivergent teachers, there's often a unique ability to connect with students who face similar challenges.

“When teachers have the right skills and tools, not only are they better equipped to support neurodivergent students, but the cognitive and emotional capacity that would free up would benefit their own mental health as well as the neurotypical students in the class.”



creative or outside-the-box approaches can be empowering for neurodivergent students.

Despite these practical strategies, the stigma around ADHD remains a persistent problem. Misconceptions, such as the belief that individuals with ADHD are lazy or unmotivated, can be deeply harmful. “The statistic that’s bandied about is that children with ADHD receive 10,000 more negative comments by the time they finish primary school,” the teacher said. They added that this number, though shocking, might actually underestimate the reality for many children. Unfortunately, these negative perceptions can follow individuals into adulthood, affecting how neurodivergent teachers view themselves and are perceived by colleagues.

The teacher admitted that even they had once held a narrow view of ADHD. “Until a few years ago, despite having ADHD myself, I had quite a narrow view of how ADHD presents, and I think that narrow view is still the predominant view.” They noted that many still picture a hyperactive, impulsive boy when thinking of ADHD, overlooking the diverse ways it can present. This shows the need for greater awareness and education about neurodiversity, not only during teacher training but also as part of ongoing professional development.

Shared experiences can create understanding and empathy, though it’s not a given. “In some cases, the shared experience of being neurodivergent can lead to deeper understanding,” the teacher noted. However, they acknowledged that neurodivergent teachers might also find certain behaviours triggering, particularly when already stretched thin. This complexity highlights the need for a supportive work environment where neurodivergent teachers have the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Practical strategies can make a big difference in creating inclusive classrooms. The teacher emphasised the importance of building strong relationships with students. “Most of our neurodivergent students are seeking approval and praise, so if you show a genuine interest in them, they’ll bend over backwards for you,” they said. Movement is another key factor. Allowing students to fidget or pace can help them focus better. “For some of our neurodivergent students, the act of sitting still and listening to you will take all their cognitive capacity, leaving nothing for learning,” they explained. Flexibility in how students demonstrate their learning is also crucial. Allowing

Supporting neurodivergent teachers requires systemic changes. Schools need to prioritise training that includes practical strategies for accommodating diverse needs. Flexible working environments can also make a big difference. Providing access to tools like assistive technology or collaborative planning systems can help teachers manage the demands of their roles more effectively. For neurodivergent teachers themselves, self-awareness is key. “Know yourself; know your strengths, your difficulties, and your needs,” the teacher advised. They also emphasised the importance of self-care, acknowledging the emotional and physical toll that teaching can take.

In their current role as an RTLB, the teacher has the opportunity to advocate for neurodivergent students and support their families. They see this as an essential part of creating inclusive classrooms and schools. By helping students understand their own brains, they can empower them to succeed. “There’s comfort in knowing you’re not alone,” they said. This work also extends to educating other teachers, helping them see the strengths and potential in neurodivergent students.

When asked what change they would make to improve support for neurodivergent individuals in education, the teacher struggled to pick just one. They pointed to the importance of kindness, compassion, and building strong relationships as foundational principles. They also highlighted inclusive teaching methods like Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which benefit all students by accommodating a range of learning styles. “Educating and supporting teachers and school leaders to be neurodiversity-affirming is the key,” they said.

Creating a supportive environment for neurodivergent teachers isn’t just about individual accommodations. It’s about building a culture that values differences and recognises the unique contributions neurodivergent educators make. Listening to and learning from the experiences of teachers like this one is an essential step in that process.





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BY THE NUMBERS

Understanding the prevalence of neurodivergence

By Ben O’Connell

Content warning: This article mentions suicide

Grasping how many students are neurodivergent is challenging. It’s estimated that 320,000 children and young people are neurodiverse in New Zealand. 10% are dyslexic, 5% have ADHD, 5% are gifted, and many have multiple neurodiversities.

This comes from a May 2023 report by the Neurodiversity in Education Coalition. Well-supported neurodiverse youth build superpowers such as empathy, problem-solving, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit. The statistics on unsupported neurodiverse youth paint a different picture.

Without support, neurodiverse young people are at significant risk. One in three autistic people is unemployed. At least half of prison inmates have dyslexia, and one-quarter of inmates have ADHD. One in four women with ADHD has attempted suicide.

Autism New Zealand says that we lack really good statistics on autism diagnosis in our country. “We know that 3% of children or 24,000 five to 14-year-olds have a diagnosis of autism as

indicated in the 2023/24 New Zealand Health Survey.

“This number is similar to international prevalence but, in reality, likely to be higher given under-reporting as well as underdiagnosis. Extrapolating these figures to the whole New Zealand population, approximately 160,000 New Zealanders are autistic.”

Neurodiversity in Education says that schools and health providers don’t reliably collect or share this information. This considerably limits our national ability to understand the issues and measure the impact of interventions.

“Further, even if we did collect this information, many (if not most) neurodivergent learners are undiagnosed, as



the diagnostic process in New Zealand through the public health/education systems is overloaded and under-resourced and the private health care system is expensive and equally overloaded.”

The Neurodiversity in Education Project drives change towards a more inclusive neuroinclusive education system. They provide free, fun, and simple programmes and resources to support young people, their whānau and their teachers and schools. Visit their website at www.neurodiversity.org.nz.

Welcome to My Brain is one example, a new card game from the Neurodiversity in Education Project to help everyone understand and celebrate neurodiversity. The cards inspire great conversations about how unique brains work, and how we can create homes, schools, tertiary, clubs and workplaces where everyone’s brain gets to shine. Visit www.neurodiversity.org.nz/welcome-to-my-brain.

Every child, whether neurotypical or neurodivergent, learns differently. By taking care to notice how they play,



One of the ways to support neurodiverse children is to create a sensory-friendly classroom. To do so:

- Reduce visual distractions and unnecessary noise
- Minimise temperature changes and strong smells
- Ensure good ventilation
- Provide space for relaxing and sensory deprivation
- Provide sensory aids like ear defenders, sunglasses, fidget toys
- Provide a variety of options for seating
- Make space for and encourage movement
- Offer a variety of activities and opportunities for learning both inside and outside the classroom at every age and stage

communicate, and interact with peers and teachers, we can adapt our teaching approaches and environments to leverage their strengths and give them the best opportunities for future success.



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Reclaiming focus

Is screen time mimicking ADHD symptoms in kids?

According to the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia Research Institute, “ADHD is the most common neurodevelopmental disorder of childhood, occurring in five to eight percent of school-age children.”

There are three different ways ADHD can present itself either as predominantly inattentive, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive, or combined.

Some symptoms of ADHD include but are not limited to: difficulty staying focused, are easily distracted, have difficulty working or playing quietly, hyperactive, impulsive and more.

But how does screen time impact symptoms of ADHD?

According to OECD data collected in 2018, New Zealand’s youth used their digital devices on average 42 hours per week,

whereas globally, it was 35 hours. Since then, studies have shown that screen use amongst children has risen.

Founder of Child Behaviour Service NZ, Karen Campbell, says while technology and screens are useful tools for education, teachers and parents need to understand the underlying impacts excessive screen time and social media consumption can have on our youth.

“You can use the internet for knowledge and all those sorts of things and learning guided by the teacher, so that can be a really effective tool, but what has actually ended up happening is that instead, we kind of went “here you go kids use these devices”, and we haven’t fully understood the consequences of that.”

Increased screen time has been linked to four fundamental negative effects in children, including those with ADHD: addiction, attention

fragmentation, sleep deprivation and social deprivation.

“Children need face-to-face contact, to be in teams, to participate in different activities, to engage in physical activity, and to have opportunities to create and take risks. This builds neural pathways in the brain. Each hour of screen time deprives them of this.

Karen says that because children with ADHD have traits that make it difficult for them to manage impulsivity, focus, and attention span, “the research around what technology is doing to kids’ brains is going to be exacerbated for children with ADHD because they already have that existing difficulty with impulsivity and difficulty focusing.

“I also sometimes think that ADHD is way over diagnosed currently, and research informs us that prolonged time on phones and the sleep deprivation caused by phones mimic ADHD symptoms.”

Karen quotes Johnathon Haidt (The Anxious Generation, 2024), who believes one way to help combat the negative impacts of social media and screen time not only for children is “raising the age of internet use to 16 as that is beyond what may be the most sensitive period for harm from social media, 11 to 15 for girls and 14 to 15 years old for boys.

“More children have difficulty with reading books or long pieces of text because they have trained their brains to just look at snippets of information, and they have not developed what we call ‘reading stamina.’”

Karen would also encourage parents to delay their children’s access to smartphones for as long as feasible, understanding that there is peer pressure.

“If parents and schools collectively were able to work together with boundaries, then this would be preferable so that single children don’t feel as though they are missing out.”

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BREAKING BARRIERS

The case for NZSL in every classroom

By Jamie Quinn



New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of the country's three official languages, alongside English and Te Reo Māori. While it's mainly used by the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) community, it has a lot to offer hearing students and school communities as a whole. Cindy Cascalheira from Ko Taku Reo Deaf Education New Zealand explains how introducing NZSL in mainstream classrooms can make a big difference for everyone involved.

Cindy shares how learning NZSL helps create more inclusive school environments. Programs like the NZSL@School service allow DHH students to communicate more effectively and fully take part in school life. "Learning NZSL has positively impacted school communities and individual students by fostering inclusivity and enhancing communication," she says. At the same time, hearing students learning NZSL develop new skills and contribute to building a stronger sense of connection. "NZSL is a language that can enhance both hearing and Deaf children's access to the curriculum," Cindy adds.

"It promotes empathy, cultural awareness, and the ability to communicate with a broader range of individuals, fostering

a more inclusive environment," she explains. "In the classroom, NZSL enhances authentic communication between Deaf and hearing peers by providing a common language, reducing misunderstandings, and encouraging collaboration. This shared mode of communication helps build stronger relationships and mutual respect among students."

That said, there are some challenges to making NZSL a regular part of the curriculum. Cindy highlights the shortage of qualified NZSL teachers and resistance from those who don't fully understand its value. However, resources like TeachSign and support from organisations like Ko Taku Reo can help schools overcome these obstacles. "It would be

a step forward if there was an acknowledgement that NZSL is an official language and resources provided to support that in schools," Cindy says.

Some schools have already had great success with NZSL. Cindy mentions an example from the Education Gazette in 2022, where a school integrated NZSL into its everyday activities, helping both DHH and hearing students thrive. Programs like NZSL@School have also been praised for supporting DHH students in mainstream schools. For schools looking to get started, Cindy suggests using resources from TeachSign, working with Ko Taku Reo, and offering professional development for staff. She also recommends reaching out to local Deaf communities for guidance and support.

There are also some common misconceptions about NZSL. Some people think it's only useful for Deaf students or that it's too difficult for hearing students to learn. Cindy disagrees, saying, "NZSL is accessible to all learners and offers cognitive and social benefits to hearing students as well. Learning NZSL

"Learning NZSL has positively impacted school communities and individual students by fostering inclusivity and enhancing communication."

enhances communication skills and broadens cultural understanding. These benefits are valuable in diverse and interconnected societies," Cindy says.

Ko Taku Reo currently supports 4,000 DHH students across New Zealand, along with their families and schools. Expanding NZSL in classrooms could benefit even more students, helping to bridge the gap between Deaf and hearing communities. Cindy's insights show that NZSL is a way to create stronger connections and make schools more welcoming for everyone.



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Aa



Bb



Cc



Dd



Ee



Ff



Gg



Hh



Ii



Jj



Kk



Ll



Mm



Nn



Oo



Pp



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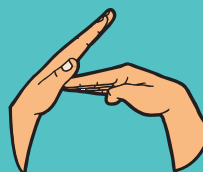
Ww



Xx



Yy



Zz



Click on the sign to view a video entry of the letter on the [NZSL Dictionary](#)

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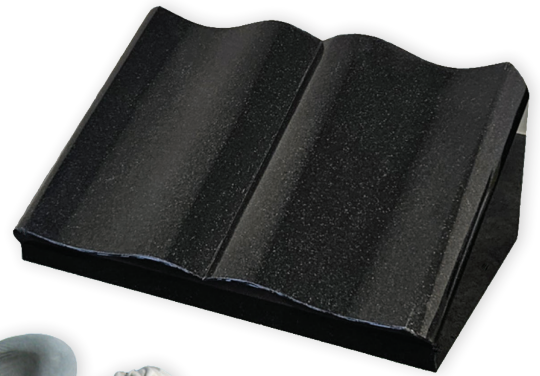
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Building school readiness

By Jamie Quinn

Deciding when a child is ready to start school can be tricky for parents. Some wonder if their child is ready to go at five, while others think waiting until they're closer to six might be better. For kids with birthdays near the cut-off, the decision feels even harder. Parents worry about whether their child will be bored with another year at preschool or struggle if they start school too soon.

School readiness is about more than just age. It's also about making sure kids have the skills they need to enjoy school and tackle its challenges, rather than just getting by. It's important to focus on emotional and social maturity, as these are the foundations for a smooth start at school.

It's a common myth that school readiness means kids should already know how to read, write, or count. These are things they'll learn at school. What really matters is whether they can manage their emotions, get along with others, and handle everyday tasks.

These are the skills that help them feel confident and ready to learn.

Preschool teachers are a great resource for determining whether a child is ready for school. They've observed children in a learning and social environment and can offer valuable advice. Parents should feel comfortable asking for their input to help make this big decision.

There are some key things to look for when deciding if a child is ready for school:

- Can they follow simple instructions and move on

to new activities without too much fuss?

- Do they show interest in playing and interacting with other kids?
- Can they express their feelings and needs, even in a busy environment?
- Are they able to focus on a task for a little while without getting distracted?
- Can they handle being away from their parent or caregiver for an extended period?

These aren't things kids need to do perfectly, but they give a good sense of whether they're ready for the classroom.

Parents can do a lot to help their children get ready for school. Simple activities like reading stories together, singing songs, or playing games with letters and numbers can make a big difference. Taking kids on outings and encouraging curiosity about the world also helps them learn and grow.

Social play is another key area. Regular playdates or group activities allow children to practice sharing, taking turns, and getting along with others. These interactions help build the social skills they'll use in the classroom.

Practical skills are just as important. Teaching kids how to manage basic tasks like going to the toilet, washing their hands, putting on shoes, or carrying their bag can boost their confidence. Being able to handle these little things independently makes a big difference when they start school.

Starting school is a big step, but with the right support, kids can enter this new phase feeling excited and ready to learn. Emotional and social skills are at the heart of school readiness, so it's important to focus on these as much as academic basics. Parents, preschool teachers, and schools should be collaborating to make the transition a positive experience for every child.

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Ampelite NZ Ltd is a manufacturer and distributor of natural lighting roofing products that has been operating in New Zealand for 25 years. Their extensive product range caters for both residential and commercial applications. The residential range includes products like Solasafe and Easyclick polycarbonate roofing that are suitable for roofing residential deck areas and pergolas. All of Ampelite's polycarbonate products are UV protected for the New Zealand environment and are available through leading builders merchants throughout New Zealand.

Ampelite is the market leader in commercial fibreglass roofing applications with its key products here being:

Wonderglas is used in warehouses, factories, gymnasiums, etc. This is available in most roofing manufacturer's profiles and has a market leading 25 year warranty for light transmission.

Webglas is a trafficable fibreglass roofing product. While designed for use in harsh industrial environment applications, it is also approved for use in schools by MoE for covered walkways, etc because of its trafficability. Webglas is the only GRP product with a 20 year light, water and structural stability warranty. It is available in Clear, Opal and coloured finishes. The colours can be made to match Colorsteel/Colorcote roofing colours as well as custom colours depending on quantities.

Further to these products, Ampelite's extensive range includes multi-wall polycarbonate products like Thermoclear and Thermoclick, roofing ventilation products for both residential and commercial use through the Ampelair ventilator range and the Panorama soffit lining system.

To find out about these products and more visit us online at www.ampelite.co.nz or call **0800 267354** to find your closest stockist/distributor.

Webglas in school walkway applications



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AHEAD OR BEHIND?

Making the right year group decision for your child

Choosing the right year group for a child whose age allows for flexibility in class placement is a key decision that can affect their future academic and social trajectory.

PROS OF MOVING UP A YEAR GROUP

- 1. Academic challenge:** Moving a child up a year group can significantly benefit those who excel academically and crave deeper intellectual stimulation. This challenge prevents boredom, keeps their minds engaged, and builds a love for learning. When children are continuously challenged, it can lead to higher academic achievements and more intellectual development.
- 2. Peer alignment:** Children who are mature for their age, both intellectually and emotionally, might find better camaraderie with older students. These peers may share similar interests and levels of maturity, which can create more meaningful social interactions and friendships, enhancing the child's social development.
- 3. Increased opportunities:** Being in a higher year group often provides access to advanced educational programs and extracurricular activities earlier than scheduled. This early exposure can be critical in developing specialised skills and talents and offer a competitive edge in future academic and career pursuits.

CONS OF MOVING UP A YEAR GROUP

- 1. Social and emotional gap:** Despite possible academic readiness, a younger child in an older group may struggle with the social dynamics and emotional complexities that come with older peers. This gap can sometimes lead to social isolation or emotional



distress, as they can't fully relate to the experiences and interactions of their classmates.

- 2. Physical differences:** In physical education and sports, younger children may struggle in development compared to their older peers, impacting their self-esteem and participation in physical activities. This difference can sometimes extend to general school life, where physical maturity plays a role in social hierarchy.
- 3. Pressure and stress:** The higher expectations and workload of an advanced year group can overwhelm a younger student, leading to increased stress, anxiety, and possibly burnout. These pressures could overshadow the educational benefits and lead to a negative school experience.

PROS OF MOVING DOWN A YEAR GROUP

- 1. Confidence building:** Moving down a year can build confidence for children who require more time to reach developmental milestones. Excelling among younger

peers can enhance their self-esteem and encourage active class participation, which is important for social and academic development.

- 2. Stronger foundations:** Spending an extra year in a lower grade allows children to reinforce their academic foundations. This solid base is key for future learning, ensuring they are well-prepared and confident as they progress through their educational journey.
- 3. Reduced pressure:** A less demanding academic environment can reduce stress and foster a more positive attitude towards learning. It allows children to explore a broader range of subjects and develop interests that might not have occurred in a more pressured setting.

CONS OF MOVING DOWN A YEAR GROUP

- 1. Stigma:** A negative stigma can be related back to being placed in a lower-year group, which can affect a child's social life and self-image. Parents and educators must manage this perception carefully to prevent

any negative impact on the child's mental well-being.

- 2. Boredom and disengagement:** The child may become disinterested and disengaged if the curriculum is not challenging enough. This lack of engagement can impede academic growth and reduce the child's motivation to do well.
- 3. Social adjustment:** Adjusting to a group of younger peers can be challenging, especially if the child has already established connections in their original year group. This shift may lead to difficulties in forming new friendships, which are important for emotional and social development.

The decision to move a child up or down a year group should be made carefully, considering their overall well-being, academic capabilities, and emotional maturity. Involving educational professionals and possibly child psychologists in this decision can give a broader perspective and ensure that the child is placed in an age group that best supports their growth and happiness.



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DISCUSSING SETBACKS AND THE FEAR OF FAILURE

A recent study led by the University of Auckland explored the connection between how parents discuss setbacks with their children and the children's fear of making mistakes.

Published in the British Journal of Educational Psychology, the study involved analysing 231 conversations between mothers and their eight-year-old children.

The conversations were centered around recent setbacks, such as poor performances, disappointing test results, or challenging class presentations. The researchers aimed to understand how different approaches to these setbacks influenced the children's attitudes toward mistakes.

The study focused on three main aspects of these conversations: whether the child's emotions were acknowledged, whether a plan for managing similar situations in the future was discussed and whether the child was encouraged to use resources, such as help from others, to overcome future setbacks.

Surprisingly, the study revealed that many parents did not recognise their child's emotional responses, and some even

minimised these emotions with comments like, "It was silly to feel that way," according to Dr. Elizabeth Peterson, a researcher at the University of Auckland.

Children in the study were asked to complete a questionnaire about their fear of failure, specifically about how often they had experienced a fear of making mistakes in the previous week.

The results revealed that lower levels of fear of making mistakes were linked to a specific combination of parental responses.

While merely acknowledging the child's emotions or discussing a plan for future setbacks did not significantly reduce fear, a combination of all three—emotion recognition, a plan for handling the situation, and a focus on collaboration—proved to be most effective.

For example, a statement such as "You could set aside some time to practice, and we can help with the things you find difficult," emphasised the importance of working together to manage setbacks.

This collaborative approach appears to help children feel more supported and less fearful of making mistakes. However, Dr.

Peterson cautioned that the findings are suggestive rather than conclusive, as the statistical associations were small and need further replication. Despite this, the study suggests that when parents engage in these types of conversations, they may help build a framework for their children to better manage future setbacks.

The research also revealed some striking statistics. For example, 61% of eight-year-olds reported never or almost never feeling afraid of making mistakes, while 14% said they felt this fear often or always in the previous week.

Meanwhile, 40% of mothers either didn't acknowledge or minimised their child's emotional responses, and 55% didn't discuss any sort of action plan. Additionally, 53% of mothers who did mention a resource focused only on what the child could do independently next time, with only a small number discussing external support from teachers or coaches. Furthermore, only 17% of mothers emphasised collaboration in their discussions.

Dr. Peterson highlighted the growing body of research that underscores the benefits of viewing mistakes as an integral

part of the learning process. While a certain amount of fear can be motivating, particularly before important events like exams, she emphasised that mistakes should not be stigmatised.

Fear of mistakes can lead to avoidance behaviours, such as giving up when things get tough, withdrawing from activities to avoid being seen as wrong, and ultimately missing opportunities for growth.

Interestingly, many of the conversations between mothers and children in this study lasted less than five minutes. This finding suggests that even brief discussions about setbacks can have a meaningful impact.

The data was part of the Growing Up in New Zealand longitudinal study, which tracks the health and well-being of over 6,000 young people and their families.

Overall, the study points to the importance of how parents engage with their children about mistakes and setbacks. Acknowledging emotions, planning for the future, and fostering a collaborative mindset can help children develop resilience and reduce the fear of making mistakes.

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A new chapter for Ka Ora, Ka Ako: The School Lunch Collective



As principals, you've seen firsthand the transformative power of Ka Ora, Ka Ako. The programme has nourished our tamariki, supported whānau, and strengthened our school communities.

Now, as the programme enters a new phase, the School Lunch Collective is here to build on that foundation and ensure the continued success of the programme.

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The School Lunch Collective understands that change can be challenging, especially when it comes to a programme as important as Ka Ora, Ka Ako. We bring together the expertise and extensive reach of Compass Group, Libelle, and Gilmours.

This means we have the people, processes, capacity, and knowledge to deliver nutritious meals that students will enjoy, every single school day. But, more importantly, we're committed to working closely with you.

WHAT MATTERS MOST TO PRINCIPALS

Here's how the collective is addressing your concerns:

- **Student-Approved Meals:** We have reworked recipes and tested them extensively with students. Our goal is to provide meals students will genuinely enjoy eating, not just "family favourites" that might miss the mark
- **Nutrition First:** Every meal includes vegetables or salad, often cleverly incorporated so that kids eat their entire meal without picking out the healthy bits
- **Flexibility:** We know students generally prefer hot meals, but the collective also offers cold options, especially during warmer months
- **Proven Impact:** Having worked with the programme for four years, we have seen how a healthy meal can positively influence classroom behaviour and fuel learning
- **Local Support:** Area managers have been established to work closely with your school, ensuring you have a direct point of contact

- **Responsive Service:** A national call centre is available every school day to support your school and staff with any queries or concerns
- **Sustainability:** We understand your concerns about waste and have implemented sustainable products and processes in our offering.

WORKING TOGETHER

We recognise that transitioning to a single provider across the country is a significant change. Therefore, we are committed to:

- Maintaining open lines of communication

- Being responsive to your feedback
- Adapting processes to meet the unique needs of your school
- Measuring success as your students eating and enjoying their meals, and by how well our service integrates with your school's needs.

LOOKING AHEAD

The School Lunch Collective is committed to being more than just a meal provider. We are your partners in continuing the great work of Ka Ora, Ka Ako, to ensure every student has the nutrition to learn, grow, and thrive.



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ON THE ROAD TO A REWARDING CAREER

One of the key rites of passage for New Zealanders is getting their driver's licence, a major symbol of independence for many young adults. For young builder Riley Betham, who had his driver's licence fee paid for through his BCITO Gateway programme, it's also been the key to finding a rewarding job beyond school.

For students looking at careers where driving is a requirement, getting a licence is essential to their employment prospects. However, the cost of sitting the tests can often be a barrier.

"A valid driver's licence is increasingly essential for securing apprenticeships in the building and construction industry, enabling workers to get to and from their job sites easily, and make pick-ups and deliveries when needed. However, the current environment is making it tougher for young people to afford some of those incidental costs to getting on the employment ladder. We wanted to do something to help students get one step closer to their career in the trades and boost their employability, which is why we are financially assisting students with driver license testing" says BCITO Director, Greg Durkin.

Riley Betham was one of the lucky students who participated in a trial BCITO scheme in 2024, as part of his Gateway course at Auckland's Sacred Heart College. The BCITO Gateway programme is offered to schools across the country, enabling students to receive hands-on experience in the trades via local employers, alongside their school studies. Interest in the programme is growing fast, rising from 362 student enrolments in 2020 to 564 in 2024.

From 2025, all students in the programme will be eligible to have the cost of applying for a Class 1 car driver's licence covered by BCITO.

The trial licence scheme was the perfect opportunity for Riley, who had his heart set on a career in the trades and wasn't quite sure how to make it a reality.

"I had no interest in going to school, but I wasn't prepared to pursue a career in building full-time either. I asked my career advisor what my options were, so she introduced me to the Gateway programme, which I found really enjoyable," he says.

Being able to get his driver's licence paid by BCITO through his school was a great incentive to do well.

"Knowing BCITO covered it meant it was one less expense I had to worry about. It made it easier because I felt like I had to pass, otherwise I would be letting others down by wasting their time and money trying to help me," he adds.

"My driver's licence means I've been able to travel from site to site, which has been useful and has made me more independent. I've also been able to help out more around the house by dropping off siblings and getting things for the family."

Kathy Wiltshire, 2024 Head of Department Careers at fellow participating school Tawa College, says her students shared the same experience.

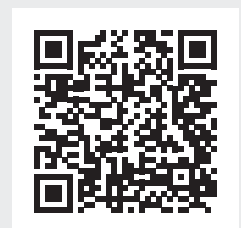
"Students were really excited for this opportunity and being booked to sit their licence – it really motivated them. Some of them had put it in the 'can't be bothered' basket, but this provided the push they needed," she says.

Having finished his schooling, Riley is now looking forward to starting an apprenticeship with Cheyne Construction, the employer who provided his work experience through the Gateway programme.

"They constructed my poppa's house a few years ago, and we were impressed with their values and what they stood for. We therefore asked them if they were willing to take me on, and they agreed. For me, this programme has been fantastic. It has helped me fully understand what construction will look like in the future and the steps that lead up to it," he says.

BCITO is looking for more schools to join the Gateway programme, and help more students into a lifelong career before they even graduate. To qualify for the free driver's licence fees, schools must book driving tests on behalf of their students and cover the upfront cost. This will then be reimbursed by BCITO.

One test fee per student will be covered in 2025.



To find out more, visit bcito.org.nz/gateway

**GET THEM
ON THE ROAD**

———— TO A ————

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For full terms and conditions take a look at BCITO's Gateway MoU.

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Gateway to success

Meet Caleb, a current EarnLearn Plumbing, Gasfitting and Drainlaying apprentice who got his start in the industry at high school through the Gateway programme.

“When I was in school, I knew I didn’t want to be in an office all day. I went through the Gateway programme and found Plumbing and Gasfitting. I really enjoyed that one day a week out of school, so I decided to turn it into a career.”

After completing EarnLearn’s Gateway programme and getting a taste for the industry, Caleb secured an apprenticeship with a local plumbing company. Four years on, Caleb is now almost fully qualified, with his apprenticeship with EarnLearn set to finish this year.

“The people at EarnLearn have helped me all the way through,”

Caleb adds. “They really care and help to motivate me.”

Aside from the practical experience he has gained and the support he has received during his apprenticeship, Caleb is also a big fan of earning while learning.

“The best thing about earning while I learn on the job is I get a sense of accomplishment for what I’ve earned. It’s taught me financial skills and independence, and I don’t have a student loan.”

About EarnLearn’s Gateway programme

EarnLearn’s Gateway programmes offer high school students a unique opportunity to gain practical work experience in Plumbing, Gasfitting and Drainlaying, Electrical or Scaffolding - while still in school.

Through partnerships with secondary schools and local businesses, EarnLearn’s Gateway



programmes combine on-job training with theory learning, allowing students in Years 11-13 to earn credits towards NCEA Level 2 and 3 qualifications.

The programmes are an excellent opportunity for students to explore different fields, gain industry connections, and start

building their careers while still in high school.

Register your school with EarnLearn’s Gateway programmes now.

earnlearn.ac.nz/gateway
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EarnLearn Gateway programmes

Provide your students with a foot in the door and a pathway to success with Gateway!

EarnLearn’s Gateway programmes offer Year 11-13 students a unique opportunity to gain practical work experience in Plumbing, Gasfitting and Drainlaying, Electrical or Scaffolding - while still in school.

Combining theory with on-job training, students doing Gateway will kick-start their careers, all while earning credits towards NCEA Level 2 and 3 qualifications.

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Gate opens to career opportunity

One of Bailey's favourite parts of working as a trainee line mechanic with PowerNet in Te Anau is working at heights.

"I really like working up the poles. It's fun. Better than being in an office all day," he says.

Bailey got his start in the electricity supply industry (ESI) with PowerNet via the Connexis Gateway programme, which gives Year 11, 12 and 13 students the opportunity to gain on-job work experience onsite with local employers while earning NCEA credits, which may align to one or more of the six Vocational Pathways.

Connexis offers training in infrastructure trades in civil construction, energy, telecommunications and water. It works with employers in those industries to place high school students looking at career options.

Bailey, 20, worked with the small four-person team at PowerNet's Te

Anau depot every Friday through his last year of high school. That experience saw him employed by the company as a full-time trainee line mechanic at the start of 2023.

He says as well as giving him an understanding of what line mechanics do, Gateway helped him get to know the PowerNet team.

"That helped make the change easier; going from the classroom and one day a week at the depot, to working here full-time."

Bailey's boss, PowerNet Team Leader Hamish Prentice says Gateway is helpful in making sure new trainees are a good fit.

"It was great having that year leading up to Bailey starting full-time. We got to know him and he got to know what the job involves. It meant when he did start as a trainee he could hit the ground running," Hamish says.

Bailey says Gateway is a chance for students to learn about jobs they might not know exist, while learning skills required in those jobs.



He says he would recommend Gateway to others. "Everything was new when I started Gateway but the company has made it pretty easy for me to learn and fit in.

There's always someone around that can help."

Go to www.connexis.org.nz/schools/ to find out more.



GIVE YOUR STUDENTS THE WORK EXPERIENCE OF A LIFETIME.

Students in Years 11-13 who like big projects and working outdoors will love Connexis Gateway programmes. They get on-job work experience with local infrastructure firms, theory learning and the chance to prove themselves to future employers.

Connexis is New Zealand's leading infrastructure training provider. Our Gateway programmes are NZQA-recognised micro-credentials with unit standards set at Level 2 and 3.

Speak to us about Connexis Gateway today.

Learn More

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CONNEXIS
INFRASTRUCTURE TRAINING

Beyond the classroom – what little blue penguins can teach our future leaders

Nestled on the waterfront in a small town on the east coast of the South Island, the Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony stands out as an exemplary model of how environmental education can inspire and instil a sense of responsibility in young minds.

Each year, hundreds of students from a range of primary, intermediate and secondary schools across Aotearoa visit Ōamaru to take part in the Colony's school programme. This immersive, hands-on experience brings the fascinating world of little blue penguins, or kororā, to life.

About the programme:

The interactive sessions are designed to engage students in a way that is both informative and entertaining. Through guided tours, educational talks, and interactive activities, students learn about the penguins' natural habitats, their behaviours, and the conservation challenges they face. This direct exposure fosters a deep understanding and appreciation for wildlife, encouraging students to consider how they might play a part in future conservation efforts.

During the daytime, students explore the colony under the guidance of experienced educators. Gaining insights on the penguins' habitat, adaptations, and how they have responded to human-induced changes, students will then observe penguins in their nests, before having a go at making their own. Learning from the colony's top researchers, they will discover how scientists study the penguins, to better understand the threats they face, and will draw inspiration from the conservation efforts needed to keep their population flourishing.

In the evening, the penguins return from a day foraging at sea. Students listen to expert guides deliver informative commentary while observing the penguins



and their fascinating behaviours as they return to their nests.

It's about spreading the message of conservation beyond the classroom – building a community that is knowledgeable and passionate about protecting its natural heritage.

By incorporating the Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony school programme into your curriculum, you might just inspire the next generation to pursue research and conservation. All students – whatever their interests – will come away with a unique and enriching educational experience.

Much more than a field-trip:

- **Immersive learning experience:** The programme provides hands-on opportunities for students to engage with the natural world.
- **Expert guidance:** Students are led by experienced educators who offer deep insights into the penguins' world. Their knowledge is second-to-none, ensuring students receive a well-rounded education that is grounded in the latest scientific knowledge.
- **Penguin habitat exploration:** Daytime activities include exploring penguin habitats and observing nesting behaviour, while in our evening sessions students observe penguins returning from foraging at sea.
- **Inspiring future changemakers:** With an aim of inspiring and educating future change-makers, the experience facilitates a deep appreciation for the natural world, scientific enquiry, and reinforces the importance of conservation.

Book your visit today
www.penguins.co.nz



MAKE THE COLONY YOUR CLASSROOM!



The Ōamaru Blue Penguin Colony's school programme is an immersive, hands-on educational experience to inspire our next generation of change-makers.

Explore penguin habitats, observe nesting behaviour, and learn firsthand from experts and scientists about how the Colony protects the kororā (little blue penguins) in Ōamaru.



Enquire today at www.penguins.co.nz

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N4L: HELPING KEEP ĀKONGA SAFER ONLINE AND HOW WEB FILTERING CAN HELP

The internet is an incredible resource for ākonga of all ages. An important consideration for school leaders, however, is how to give ākonga access to the positive parts of the internet, whilst supporting them to stay safe in an increasingly online world.

As part of a school's wider safety posture and policies, web filtering is one of the available online safety tools schools and kura can use to help. Network for Learning's (N4L) Web Filtering is available to all schools connected to the Managed Network and lets your school block specific websites, applications and categories of websites.

It's really important to understand what N4L's Web Filtering can and can't do, so the risks are understood and your school leaders or board can act on them. Here's what you need to know.

CATEGORY FILTERING

As part of their Web Filtering service, schools can ask N4L to

block entire internet categories, or specific websites within a category. As a minimum, N4L recommends all schools adopt their Safe & Secure Internet recommended settings as a baseline level of protection, which includes blocking categories such as Explicit Violence, Pornography, Terrorism and Drug Abuse. Schools can also choose additional categories or websites to block or allow.

GETTING SPECIFIC ABOUT APPROPRIATE CONTENT

Web Filtering lets your school or kura set its own rules. For example, some choose to block the 'Social Networking' or 'Games' categories on the school network, while others allow these categories, but may choose to block YouTube or Roblox.

You can set restrictions for different user groups and apply restrictions to a particular user group at a certain time of day.

N4L can only block what your school has asked them to - so it's up to school leaders to determine how restrictive or permissive they'd like N4L's Web Filtering to be for their learning environment.

Web Filtering cannot block specific content (such as images or videos) within a website that your school has chosen to allow.

This means that if your school allows access to YouTube - which many schools use as a learning resource - then inappropriate videos within YouTube won't be blocked by N4L.

However, there are steps your IT contact can take to mitigate this, such as implementing Restricted Mode in YouTube or changing filtering settings in your Google Workspace. For more information on how to do this, go to n4l.co.nz/onlinesafety.

FILTERING + COMMUNICATION = IMPROVED ONLINE SAFETY

As always, it's crucial to remember that online safety is a team effort and no filtering solution is 100% effective.

Web Filtering also works best when it's supported by teaching digital citizenship, and ensuring appropriate policies and user agreements are in place.

To support schools, N4L has developed a guide outlining the different roles and responsibilities regarding online

safety. View the guide at n4l.co.nz/onlinesafety.

Network for Learning's (N4L) Web Filtering is available to all schools connected to the Managed Network and lets your school block specific websites, applications and categories of websites.



If you'd like to review your Web Filtering settings or have questions, contact N4L's Customer Support team on **0800 LEARNING (0800 532 764)** or email support@n4l.co.nz.



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CHOOSING OUR RESPONSE TO AI

Embrace innovation while managing the risks

By Stephen McConnachie

Generative AI came crashing onto the education scene less than two years ago. Tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot have left many educators scrambling to keep up. How do we protect assessment? How do we preserve academic rigour? How do we prepare students for an AI world?

We can't ignore this. Some students and teachers are already using it; others are being left behind. As a sector, and as individual schools, we need a proactive response.

BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL'S RESPONSE TO AI

A proactive response involves policies, professional development, and support from your networks. You probably already have a digital lead in your staff, so involve them in the conversation.

That's not the same as "direct them to address the issue and report back."

You do not have to become an AI expert, nor do you have to carry the load for this issue; by all means, delegate the work to a digital lead. But this is bigger than just rolling out a new digital teaching tool. You can't delegate the paradigm shift. Education specialist Carolyn Stuart wrote about this in a recent blog article: senior leaders should be actively involved in the decision-making for their school's response to AI, rather than solely relying on their digital leads to guide them.

BALANCE PROTECTING WITH PROMOTING GOOD PRACTICE

A natural response to the 'AI threat' might be to ban and block. A deliberate response must be more nuanced and balanced.

We can apply what we've learned from managing digital safety in schools. Strike a balance between 'strategies that protect' and 'strategies that promote healthy behaviour'. Protect ākonga from harm with blocks, filters, and

It would be naive to think that if we don't engage with AI in our school, then students won't use it. The real question is how students will use it. And we've already seen it: students using ChatGPT to take shortcuts in their work.

clear policies; promote safe and effective practice by leading discussions and building AI literacy.

Blocking adult content on the school network, for example, won't guarantee students' safety. We also need to support students to make healthy decisions. The same is true for our school's response to engaging with generative AI. Our approach must balance 'protect' strategies and 'promote' strategies.

Neither approach is enough on its own. What's more, the balance between the two will look different depending on the learners. Younger ākonga need more 'protect' than 'promote'; lock it all down. Older ākonga need more of a balance as they prepare to leave the protective environment of school. Set them up with the skills and confidence to manage their own digital decisions.

SHORTCUT THE PROCESS, NOT THE DEPTH

It would be naive to think that if we don't engage with AI in our school, then students won't use it. The real question is how students will use it. And we've already seen it: students using ChatGPT to take shortcuts in their work.

This is not inherently bad or lazy. All human innovation and progress comes from somebody looking for a better way. We, ourselves, use tools to take shortcuts in our own work. The difference is that we know where the line is; we can discern which shortcuts are appropriate.

So, what's an appropriate shortcut? One that brings efficiency to the process, without sacrificing depth and authenticity.

We want students to learn to shortcut the process, not the depth.

START SMALL, BUT START SOMEWHERE

While this is critical mahi, it doesn't need to be overwhelming – especially in the face of a curriculum refresh, NCEA co-requisites, structured literacy and maths initiatives, and relief teacher budget pressures.

So how do we keep it manageable? Start small, but start somewhere. Ask, "what does a worthwhile first step for our school look like? What are the easy wins?" Your first step might be different from the school down the road, and that's OK. Start somewhere.



Stephen McConnachie
Leadership Consultant & Founder,
Think e-Learning

Once you have some momentum, you can approach it like you would manage any change. Some factors to consider:

- Who can help drive this?
- What barriers need to be removed to support teachers' confidence and competence with AI?
- What are the most urgent gaps to close?
- What good stuff is already happening in our school that we can build on?

ADOPT POLICIES TO SAFEGUARD STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' USE

Ensure your policies are fit for purpose in the AI era. Important points to consider include age restrictions for students, whether the school allows AI tools in the classroom, and clarity around plagiarism.

Consider policies to cover teachers' use of AI too. I've heard of teachers putting students' assessment data into free AI tools to speed up the marking process. You know what they say about tech: "If you're not paying, then you're not the customer – you're the product." In general, you should assume that every chat prompt and every response is being gobbled up by the global beast to train the AI model. That includes students' data. The exceptions to this are Google's Gemini and Microsoft's Copilot – when users access these with a school login, their chat data is kept secure.

It's particularly important to consider AI in your assessment policies. In fact, if your school



or kura offers NCEA standards, it's worth noting that NZQA requires that schools include the acceptable use of AI in their assessment policies.

The good news is that you don't need to reinvent the wheel. There are plenty of AI policy templates available online – start with Netsafe's free resources at education.netsafe.org.nz.

MIX-AND-MATCH TO ENSURE VALID ASSESSMENT

The dangers that AI presents to assessment authenticity are real, but not insurmountable. Well... mostly.

Generative AI highlights the disconnect between 'assessment for learning' and 'assessment for qualification'. Assessment for learning can still be valid with AI thrown in. The trick, like any good assessment design, is to mix and match. Use a variety of assessment modes to build up a picture, an evolving record of learning, rather than a snapshot of a single moment. Incorporate AI into some assessment tasks; block them in others. Include a pen-and-paper assessment as part of this bigger picture being painted.

When thinking about how to incorporate AI into assessment, consider the opportunities around depth and richness. It's like permitting graphics calculators in a maths test: where appropriate, students can skip some procedural steps to get deeper faster. They can discuss

In the hands of a skilled teacher, any teaching tool can be transformational for learning.

patterns and trends without having to build the graphs manually first. Generative AI presents similar opportunities. Include assessments which are designed to leverage AI to skip procedural steps, and balance this with AI-free assessments that test those procedural steps.

If we are deliberate about the design, AI can deepen assessment for learning. It's the validity of summative assessment which is the harder nut to crack. There's no easy answer to this yet, but we can make considerable inroads by being proactive and purposeful about AI use, policies, and systems.

GOOD PEDAGOGY IS GOOD PEDAGOGY

There's a lot of concern about generative AI, and some of it is well founded. But there is opportunity too. What does good look like?

In the hands of a skilled teacher, any teaching tool can be transformational for learning. That includes AI. There are ways to use it to transform and deepen learning,

and those ways have their foundation in your teachers' existing pedagogy.

Good teachers know good teaching. They know critical thinking; they know how to take students deeper. Digital pedagogy reflects these same principles, and AI pedagogy is just an extension of this.

Use AI to take students' thinking deeper. Get them to investigate, create, collaborate, explore, synthesise, and articulate their understanding. Use AI as one step in a larger, richer learning activity.

Reassure your teachers that their years of experience and expertise are still valid. The foundation of effective practice with AI is quality teaching and learning.

GET EXTERNAL SUPPORT

You are not alone.

When digital technology arrived, the world embraced it over a span of decades. It was easy to feel isolated if your neighbours are in a different stage of that journey. That's not the case with genAI. It arrived with a bang two years ago, and we're all grappling with it at the same time.

Resources and communities of practice are popping up all over the world, including right here in Aotearoa.

Start with these:

- Ministry of Education website - search for "Generative AI"
- Netsafe's Kete <https://education.netsafe.org.nz/>

- NZQA website - search for 'AI guidance'
- UNESCO's recently released AI Competency Framework for Teachers
- New Zealand's even-more-recently-released Scaffolded AI Literacy (SAIL) Framework for Education
- AI in Education community of practice for New Zealand educators <https://futurelearning.nz/p/ai-in-education-community-of-practice>
- PLD providers
- Other schools in your Kāhui Ako or existing networks
- Ask AI! Tell Gemini that you're a principal of a school in Aotearoa, and you have concerns about AI's implications for assessment, students' depth of thinking, and staff workload. Ask it to give you suggestions for how to address or mitigate these.

TAKE ONE STEP AND BUILD MOMENTUM

We can't ignore AI. This wave is not going away. But if we're deliberate and intentional about our approach, we can ride the wave instead of being swept away.

So start small, but start somewhere – talk to your school's digital lead, download the Netsafe policy template, and choose a first step that works for your context. As we all take our first steps right across the motu, we collectively build momentum with an intentional response to this brave new world.

Why independent post-installation inspections are a must

Ensuring playground safety is paramount, and this begins with a thorough, independent post-installation inspection that adheres to NZS 5828 standards. For any new or recently completed playground project, this step isn't just about ticking a compliance box; it's a crucial investment in the well-being of the children who will use the space.

Playground safety standards, such as NZS 5828, are meticulously designed to minimize risks, prevent injuries, and create an environment where children can explore and play without unnecessary hazards. An independent inspection serves as a safeguard, ensuring that all



equipment and surfacing meet these rigorous safety criteria.

Post-installation inspections by certified, impartial agencies are essential for a few reasons. Firstly, they bring an objective perspective, unaffected by the biases or potential oversight of those involved in the

playground's construction. This fresh set of expert eyes is trained to identify both obvious and subtle safety issues, from equipment stability to the quality and depth of impact-absorbing surfaces. These inspections also verify that the playground aligns

with the specific needs of its intended age group, ensuring suitability and safety for the children it serves.

Moreover, an independent certification provides peace of mind for schools BOT's. It assures all stakeholders, from parents to governing bodies, that the playground meets nationally recognised safety standards. This certification can also be a legal shield, demonstrating a commitment to upholding safety regulations and potentially reducing liability in the event of accidents.

Investing in an independent post-installation inspection is a proactive step that reinforces the commitment to child safety, ensures compliance, and enhances community trust.

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As schools prioritise environmental stewardship, the playground has emerged as a prime canvas for showcasing sustainability in action. Play Matta leads the way with their innovative recycled rubber and plastic playground surfaces.

Play Matta's mission began over 30 years ago when their founder saw an opportunity to turn discarded materials into safe, durable play surfaces. Today, their products contain up to 85% recycled content - everything from road cones and old pool toys to medical waste.

This circular approach not only diverts waste from landfills, but also creates surfaces that are as eco-friendly as they are resilient. Sustainability isn't just about



using recycled materials; it's about ensuring those materials meet the highest safety and quality standards.

To achieve this, Play Matta has implemented a rigorous manufacturing process. All

source materials undergo thorough washing and grading, transforming them into a top-tier product with their ISO 9001 and ISO 45001 certifications.

But Play Matta's sustainability story doesn't end there. When

their products finally reach the end of their lifespan, they can be recycled again, completing the circle. It's a true testament to their mission of turning waste into something meaningful and long-lasting.



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Safe and sustainable playgrounds: The importance of natural surfacing

For schools and early childhood education (ECE) centres, ensuring the safety of outdoor play areas is a top priority. Playground surfaces play a critical role in protecting children from injuries, particularly from falls. This is where bark-based surfaces, such as those offered by Azwood, come into focus—not just for their impact-absorbing properties, but for their sustainability.

Azwood's playground surfacing products—Bounce Bark, Bounce Bark® Chip, and Curamet—are certified to meet New Zealand and Australian safety standards (NZS5828:2015, AS4685.0:2017). These materials cushion falls, offering peace of mind to

schools knowing their students are safer on the playground. When children run, jump, and climb, these surfaces absorb the impact, reducing the likelihood of serious injury.

However, safety is only one aspect of the conversation. With environmental consciousness on the rise, schools and ECE centres are increasingly looking for sustainable solutions. Natural bark surfacing ticks that box. Azwood's products are made from sustainably sourced wood, giving schools an option that not only safeguards children but also supports the environment.

Beyond its safety benefits, bark surfacing decomposes naturally, returning valuable nutrients to the earth. This aligns well with many educational institutions' commitment to teaching sustainability and environmental responsibility. With synthetic surfaces, maintenance can be

cumbersome, and disposal often contributes to environmental waste. By contrast, products like Curamet are designed to minimise environmental impact, making it easier for schools to align with eco-friendly practices.

Durability is another consideration. Playground surfaces take a beating from frequent foot traffic, rain, and varied weather conditions. Bounce Bark® and Bounce Bark® Chip are resilient, allowing them to last through New Zealand's changing seasons. They drain well, helping avoid waterlogging and slippery conditions that might deter outdoor play in winter months. Maintenance is straightforward, typically involving only occasional topping up to ensure the proper depth and cushioning.

Choosing natural bark surfaces is about making a long-term investment. These surfaces

allow children to play freely and safely while teaching important lessons about sustainability. The natural aesthetics of wood-chip playgrounds can enhance outdoor learning environments, bringing children closer to nature, which has been shown to improve their cognitive and emotional development.

In the end, Azwood's playground surfacing solutions offer more than just compliance with safety standards. They provide schools and ECE centres with a sustainable, durable, and low-maintenance option that benefits both students and the environment. Investing in natural bark surfacing reflects a commitment to safe, sustainable play, offering children a secure space to grow and explore.

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CREATING FUTURE LEADERS

Why schools should invest in education outside of the classroom, despite additional costs.

Experiences outside the traditional classroom play a significant role in shaping a child's educational journey.

These out-of-classroom activities often create lasting memories, offering students the opportunity to explore new environments that highlight various aspects of history, the present, or the future.

Education Outside the Classroom (EOTC) initiatives involve taking students beyond the school grounds for learning experiences that challenge them in different settings. These activities can range from a brief exploration of the schoolyard to a half-day excursion to a local museum or a river and even more immersive activities like camping or participating in an arts festival.

Although these experiences may come with extra costs, they are highly valuable for fostering growth in students. They help

children become more confident, independent, and resilient, qualities that can enhance their academic performance as well.

In addition to improving academic outcomes, EOTC experiences also provide opportunities for students to develop essential life skills that are not always emphasised in the traditional classroom setting, such as teamwork, compromise, and leadership.

While memorisation is useful for building foundational knowledge, hands-on engagement with the world around them often leads to deeper understanding and personal growth.

The power of novelty in learning

New and unique experiences play a crucial role in enhancing memory and learning. When individuals encounter something novel, their brains release dopamine, a neurotransmitter associated with pleasure and motivation. This release of dopamine helps us focus on new stimuli, which is thought to be an evolutionary adaptation to help us survive unfamiliar situations.

Because of this dopamine response, we are naturally drawn to novel experiences, and they can significantly improve our ability to learn and retain information. Studies have shown that exposure to novelty before engaging in a learning activity can boost memory retention.

For instance, experiments conducted by Otto-von-Guericke University in Germany and VU University Amsterdam demonstrated that presenting new images or music before a word-learning task enhanced memory recall. However, exposure to novelty after the learning task did not show similar benefits.

In conclusion, providing students with opportunities to engage in novel, out-of-classroom experiences not only enhances their academic success but also fosters essential life skills and personal development.

Despite the additional costs, these experiences are an investment in a child's future, helping them become more well-rounded and capable individuals.

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By merging the classroom with the great outdoors, schools foster engaged community members who embrace the future with a profound connection to the natural world. This holistic approach equips students with a diverse set of skills and perspectives, making them well-rounded individuals prepared for life's multifaceted challenges.

Engaging with nature and diverse cultures fosters environmental

stewardship and cultural appreciation, nurturing a sense of responsibility toward the planet. Regular nature exposure has the added benefit of improving mental health by reducing stress, enhancing sleep, and promoting emotional regulation.

At the core of school camps lies experiential learning. Removed from their comfort zones, students apply knowledge and problem-solving skills to real-life situations. They develop teamwork, communication, and leadership abilities while building relationships, self-confidence, and resilience—essential life skills.

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PUTTING PROPERTY MANAGEMENT UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT



The Government is taking decisive action in response to the Ministerial Inquiry into School Property, which concludes the way school property is delivered is not fit for purpose.

Education Minister Erica Stanford says, "The school property portfolio is worth \$30 billion, and it's critically important it's managed properly. This Government is taking a series of immediate actions so all Kiwi kids can learn in safe, warm and dry buildings.

"The report found the Ministry of Education's processes for managing the portfolio are bureaucratic and inefficient, its internal governance structures for property investments are not robust, funding decisions lack transparency, and its organisational structure does not provide the right level of focus or accountability.

"For example, work began with Kaipara College on a project in 2017. Plans were endorsed by the

Board in 2022, Cabinet approved funding in 2023 before the project was fully designed and consented. Despite this, the project was unable to go ahead due to the Ministry's affordability pressures.

"Many schools told reviewers about significant delays in delivery, with predictable impacts on costs. There were examples of minor projects which could require two months of construction work but had approval processes taking two years," she says.

It also identified 29 projects in the New Schools Programme that have no construction funding.

Infrastructure Minister Chris Bishop says "Improving education infrastructure is an

The school property portfolio is worth \$30 billion, and it's critically important it's managed properly. This Government is taking a series of immediate actions so all Kiwi kids can learn in safe, warm and dry buildings.

important part of laying the foundation for New Zealanders to succeed.

"We want to reassure school communities that works and improvements currently

underway at schools across the country will continue as planned while the Government develops a more efficient and sustainable solution for how we deliver school property going forward."



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The report recommended the Government:

- Establish a new entity separate from the Ministry of Education, to assume ownership and asset management responsibility for the school property portfolio
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for the funding, planning and delivery of school property
- Review and simplify the current funding model for state schools
- Implement clear processes for regular reporting and priority-setting to promote accountability, transparency, clarity of expectations, and value for money
- Establish a Transition Board and Transition Unit to oversee and coordinate the establishment of the new school property entity.
- Undertake a range of immediate actions during the transition period to simplify the operating model and ensure value for money.

Cabinet has accepted the findings and will take a phased approach to address the recommendations. The three phases are:

Phase 1 – Initial steps have been taken since commissioning the report, including instructing the Ministry of Education to focus on offsite manufacturing solutions and improve communication with schools. In Q1 2024, over 60% of new classrooms were initiated as offsite manufacturing, up from under 20% in Q4 2023. A value for money review has also been completed to ensure a more fiscally responsible approach moving forward.

Phase 2 – Interim improvements including consolidating property and network planning functions within the Ministry of Education as much as practicable, appointing a Functional Chief Executive with expertise in delivering infrastructure to have responsibility for all operational aspects of school property (this will be a two-year appointment). A new independent investment



panel will also be established to provide the CE with expert advice on ongoing property decisions and future improvements. Appointments are expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Phase 3 – Determining the new permanent model or entity for operational school property, with decisions expected in 2025.

Source:
<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/response-ministerial-inquiry-school-property>
<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/response-ministerial-inquiry-school-property>
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Mould in our schools

Are we neglecting crucial safety protocols when it comes to dealing with black mould?

In New Zealand, black mould falls under the same bio-hazard category as asbestos, yet we lack stringent procedures for black mould. Is it logical to overlook occupational safety risks in this manner?

Key decision-makers like facility/property managers, caretakers, builders, building consultants, and landlords are commonly handed the responsibility of black mould issues, despite not being certified mould experts. In a time where liability is now real, is it time to reassess the effectiveness of our health and safety procedures for black mould at commercial levels? Absolutely.

To enhance safety measures, upon discovery of black mould, the initial point of contact should be a qualified Mould Technician trained in Building Biology. This expert can assess the site, ensure immediate occupational safety, offer relocation guidance if necessary, and provide a comprehensive report detailing the mould source, recommended remediation process, and specific decontamination advice based on laboratory findings.

This approach guarantees a clear path to resolution, focusing on immediate occupational safety.

It's important to note that landlords now bear the responsibility of providing a safe working/learning environment. With WorkSafe NZ holding owners accountable for ensuring workplace safety, negligence can lead to severe consequences, including prosecution down the chain of command and insurance ramifications. As the liability landscape evolves, it's crucial to engage certified mould experts to manage bio-hazard situations professionally and effectively.

In conclusion, adopting simple steps like initial and final testing by qualified mould technicians can streamline property management, safeguard occupational safety, address landlord liabilities, and ensure a thorough, expert-led remediation process.

Toxic Mould - Proactive not Reactive!

Did you know that several common mould genres produce mycotoxins and are more frequently found in education facilities than people realize? We should also be aware that children are especially susceptible to respiratory diseases like asthma as they have immature immune systems.



A very mouldy room with toxic mould

Stachybotrys, a common toxic black mould, is associated with saturated substrates due to flooding, moisture ingress, and plumbing leaks which happen all the time, producing mycotoxins that can lead to mental and neurological health issues. These can include brain fog, dizziness, anxiety, disorientation, depression, memory loss, shaking, and seizures.

Another commonly found mould genre, Aspergillus/Penicillium, is often found in water damaged buildings and buildings with high humidity levels due to poor ventilation. Illnesses associated

with this mould include asthma and various respiratory diseases. Remember, while asthma is treatable, it is not curable, making proactive action essential if suspected or visible mould growth is detected.

When working in educational facilities, the key is to be proactive rather than reactive when it comes to mould issues. Taking action early can prevent serious health issues down the line. Let's prioritize expertise and safety when it comes to managing black mould bio-hazards.





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THE ONGOING BATTLE WITH ASBESTOS



Many schools in New Zealand still have asbestos and materials that contain asbestos. With more than 2,000 schools under its management, the Ministry of Education is dedicated to addressing asbestos issues, offering technical support and advice through their staff.

Scott Evans, the Ministry's Leader (Hautū) of Infrastructure and Digital, notes that although they don't have a nationwide assessment of asbestos in schools, buildings built or renovated before January 1, 2000, are more likely to contain asbestos.

"The use of building materials containing asbestos was widespread in New Zealand and overseas until the late 1990s because of its insulation characteristics, tensile strength, chemical resistance, acoustic protection and low cost," Scott says.



"Given the age of the school buildings across the country, asbestos or asbestos containing materials might be present in many schools."

Asbestos can be dangerous when inhaled which is why it needs to be removed if it's found in a building. Scott says that when asbestos is left in place and is in

good condition, it doesn't pose a significant health and safety risk.

"However, if it (asbestos) is disturbed during refurbishment, demolition, excavation or due to deterioration, there is a risk of asbestos fibres becoming airborne and causing potential health problems for anyone who may inhale the fibres," Scott says.

"The danger for schools is when the asbestos has not been identified and the risk has not been assessed to allow appropriate management.

"It is important to have a clear understanding of where asbestos might be present to allow the appropriate controls to be put in place. These controls might

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include actions as simple as restricting access to an area through to a full removal of the material.”

Asbestos could be found in vinyl floor tiles, roof sheeting, ceiling tiles or in textured ceilings, door and window mouldings, cladding, insulation and boiler sheds.

Scott says the best way to know if there is asbestos in a school building is to employ a qualified asbestos surveyor to assess the building.

“This is particularly important if you are about to undertake construction work at your school, as asbestos is often found during refurbishment or demolition of existing buildings.

“Before starting any construction work, your contractor must see your Asbestos Management Plan. If your building is assumed

to have asbestos, the contractor needs to undertake a further demolition or refurbishment survey,” he explains.

An Asbestos Management Plan will set out how the identified asbestos or ACM will be managed.

Scott says schools will need to engage an asbestos surveyor or competent person who has a good working and formal knowledge of asbestos management to make sure it’s done properly and in accordance with the WorkSafe guidance.

“Asbestos removal must be carried out by a licenced asbestos removal contractor,” Scott says.

“They must hold the appropriate licence for the asbestos task being undertaken and prepare and deliver an asbestos removal control plan.

“In addition to the removal contractor, there is a requirement for asbestos work to be signed off by an independent licenced asbestos assessor who will oversee the process from the initial setup through to final sign off.”

School boards and principals are responsible for identifying any asbestos in schools and managing any associated risks to eliminate or minimise exposure. The Ministry has established an asbestos management process to ensure asbestos is properly handled, both in daily operations and during construction projects.

This includes maintaining an asbestos management plan, implementing a contractor sign-in process, and several other measures.

BUILDINGS BUILT BEFORE 2000 ARE LIKELY TO CONTAIN ASBESTOS

At the time, asbestos-containing materials were widespread in New Zealand and overseas because of their fire-resistance properties, strength, and insulating capabilities.

Many New Zealand schools are more than 40 years old and, therefore, are likely to contain asbestos. As the Person Conducting a Business or Undertaking (PCBU) in control of schools, school

Who can remove and dispose of asbestos containing materials?

There are two types of asbestos removal licences – Class A and Class B.

Class A Licence holders can remove all types of asbestos, including friable (crumbling).

Class B Licence holders can only remove non-friable asbestos (solid).

boards and principals are responsible for managing asbestos in their schools.

This can seem daunting; however, with the right approach, asbestos can be well managed. Being proactive in identifying and managing asbestos is key to maintaining a safe and healthy environment for kaimahi and ākonga.

Understanding asbestos: Turning awareness into action

It’s important to remember that asbestos does not pose a significant health and safety risk when it’s left in place and is in good condition. And even in poor condition, it’s safe to leave while a solution is being developed as long as it’s controlled and asbestos fibres cannot be inhaled.

The first steps to safer buildings are understanding where the asbestos is and what condition it’s in.



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STEPS TO BETTER ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT

Know your school buildings' history

Being aware of the age and construction materials of your school buildings is the first step in identifying potential risks.

Look for common materials

Guidance on the WorkSafe website provides extensive lists and visual references, detailing the common locations of asbestos. Using these resources to recognise these materials will help you to take targeted actions to manage them safely.

Monitor the condition of materials

Regular inspections are important. If there is asbestos at your school, you need to know if it is still in good condition or if it is deteriorating.

As soon as it starts to deteriorate, the level of risk increases. Engage a qualified and experienced asbestos surveyor

to help you build an accurate understanding and make sure appropriate safety controls are introduced.

Asbestos experts will inspect your buildings and provide detailed reports to inform your school's Asbestos Management Plan (AMP).

Professional support ensures that you can move forward with confidence, knowing that you have a clear understanding of where the asbestos is and what condition it's in. Your expert will also provide advice on how to respond if the asbestos-containing materials start to deteriorate.

Asbestos Management Plans (AMPs): A blueprint for safety

AMPs are a regulatory compliance requirement. You must have one. It is the document that captures everything known about asbestos at your school.

It helps you maintain a safe environment for your staff and students, and anyone who



comes to do work on the school's buildings. An AMP also provides clear, actionable steps for managing asbestos over time.

Key components of an effective AMP include:

- **Comprehensive records**
Detailed documentation of where the asbestos is, its condition, and the actions needed to manage it
- **Proactive monitoring**
Regular checks to make sure that asbestos-containing materials remain in good condition, with clear procedures for tackling issues that arise
- **Clear responsibilities**
Defined roles for everyone

involved in asbestos management, ensuring that each task is handled by the right person at the right time

- **Actionable plans**

Step-by-step guidance for managing damaged or deteriorating asbestos, ensuring that necessary actions are taken promptly and safely.

By implementing an AMP, you are demonstrating your commitment to safety and your proactive approach to ensuring a healthy learning environment while meeting your legislative requirements.



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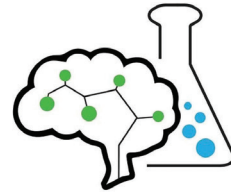
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DAY-TO-DAY ASBESTOS MANAGEMENT

1. Identify if asbestos is present

Identifying asbestos or ACM in the workplace [WorkSafe] is the first step for managing asbestos exposure risk.

How to identify asbestos:

- If your building was built prior to 1 January 2000 it is likely to contain asbestos-containing material (ACM) and you could assume that your school building contains asbestos
- You could follow the WorkSafe Approved Code of Practice Guidance to identify what is likely to contain asbestos
- You could consider training your staff to better understand how to identify asbestos
- Or you can employ a surveyor to assess your building.

Where asbestos has been identified by a Surveyor or it is assumed to exist in a school, your school needs to have an asbestos management plan in place.



2. Producing an Asbestos Management Plan

If you identify or assume the presence of asbestos in your school, an asbestos management plan is required. An asbestos management plan sets out how the identified asbestos or ACM will be managed.

You do not need to engage a surveyor to prepare your asbestos management plan. You can create your own asbestos management plan as long as you follow WorkSafe guidance.

All asbestos management plans must be in writing. They can

be in hard copy or electronic form, as long as the legally required information outlined above is included.

If the condition of the identified or assumed asbestos changes then you need to alter the Asbestos Management Plan accordingly.

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Tips on fatigue

When we're feeling energised, everything feels easier.

On the other hand, when we're dealing with fatigue, it can significantly impact our daily lives and make it difficult to get through the day.

Common causes of fatigue:

- Having an illness (cold, flu etc.)
- Sedentary lifestyle
- Overwork, strenuous exercise and/or general stress
- Not eating well enough.

Further possible causes of fatigue:

- Heart disease
- Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid)
- Sleep disorders
- Medication with a drowsy side-effect
- Hormonal changes
- Anemia
- Depression or anxiety
- Chronic fatigue syndrome

Natural approaches to fatigue

It's always best to speak with your doctor first if you experience fatigue that lasts more than a few days. However, there may be things to try in the meantime.

Prioritise sleep hygiene

Go to bed and wake up at the same time every day, even on weekends.

Maintain a balanced diet

Incorporate fruits, vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains into your diet.

Stay hydrated

Drink plenty of water throughout the day to prevent dehydration, which can cause fatigue.

Engage in moderate activity

Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days of the week. If it feels too difficult at first, take things slowly to build your stamina.

Practice mindfulness and meditation

Spend a few minutes each day practicing mindfulness or meditation to reduce stress levels.

Consider natural supplements

Discuss your options with a professional to see whether natural supplements such as vitamins, herbal teas, essential oils and more may be beneficial.

You do not need to engage a surveyor to prepare your asbestos management plan. You can create your own asbestos management plan as long as you follow WorkSafe guidance.

3. Recording asbestos risks in your hazard and risk register

To ensure that any potential risks arising from asbestos are proactively managed, it is important that details are included in your school's hazard and risk register and the information is maintained and updated.

The hazard and risk register should detail whether any asbestos or ACM has been identified or assumed and if so, it should refer to an Asbestos Management Plan which will contain detailed information about the location, condition, quantity and monitoring plan for asbestos or ACM.

Ensure you monitor the area regularly and have a process

in place in case unexpected asbestos is found.

You should provide the hazard and risk register to any contractors undertaking work within your school.

4. Communicating asbestos information

Ensure asbestos information, including the Asbestos Management Plan and Hazard and Risk Register, is accessible to staff and provided to all contractors undertaking work at your school.

5. Monitoring asbestos condition

You should schedule regular inspections of asbestos or ACM and record any changes to the condition in your Asbestos Management Plan.

TYPES OF ASBESTOS

There are two types of asbestos found in New Zealand building materials - friable and non-friable.

Non-friable asbestos is any material (other than friable asbestos) that contains asbestos. Non-friable asbestos cannot be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to a powder by hand pressure when dry.

Friable Asbestos is any material containing asbestos in the

form of a powder or can be crumbled, pulverised or reduced to powder by hand pressure when dry.

Non-friable asbestos can become friable if damaged through renovation work, or if it is unsealed or exposed to weather elements.

The only way to know if a product or material contains asbestos is to have it tested by an accredited laboratory



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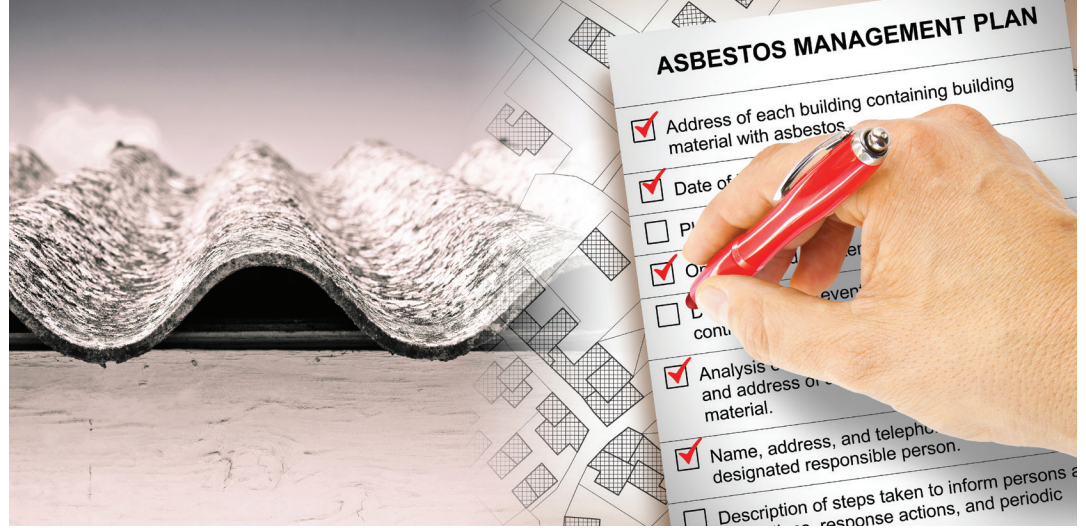
While the Health & Safety at Work (Asbestos) Regulations came into effect in April 2016, which is quite a while ago, there is still no excuse or wiggle room for failing to understand and fully comply with the regulations.

Under the legislation, any buildings built prior to the year 2000 and/or known to contain asbestos, or are assumed to have the presence of asbestos, must have an Asbestos Management Plan, which clearly sets out location of the associated asbestos and how this is being managed.

Asbestos was commonly used in building products from the 1940s onwards, and as a result, many New Zealand schools and facilities are likely to contain some form of asbestos materials.

An asbestos management plan should clearly state the location of any asbestos in the building and how it should be managed on an ongoing basis.

A proper risk assessment should be conducted to determine



whether it is safe for the asbestos to remain in place or if it needs to be removed.

For any asbestos that remains in place, the likelihood of disturbance and the appropriate actions to be taken should be factored into.

"We advise anyone who is required to manage buildings or properties that contain asbestos to undertake some type of Asbestos training so they fully

understand the risks and their responsibilities," says Sarah Tohill, communications manager for the New Zealand Demolition and Asbestos Association (NZDAA).

"We have actually just introduced a new one-day course aimed specifically at building owners and managers to help them with their understanding their duties as we see this is still such a gap."

The NZDAA is the industry body representing the entire asbestos

sector and routinely provides free information and advice to the general public through initiatives like Asbestos Awareness Week.

"Asbestos is still very much widespread in New Zealand and found in so many buildings.

"We launched Asbestos Awareness Week to help improve knowledge and promote safer practices when it comes to working around asbestos can and better manage their risks."

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FACTS ABOUT ASBESTOS

- Around 170 people die each year in New Zealand from asbestos-related diseases
- Exposure to asbestos dust can cause serious health issues, including various forms of cancer such as lung, larynx, and ovarian cancers
- Asbestos in good condition and left undisturbed is unlikely to pose a health risk and doesn't need to be removed
- If asbestos is present NEVER cut it, drill it, sand it, scrape it, scrub it, waterblast it, or demolish it, unless you have had asbestos awareness training
- If you accidentally damage or uncover asbestos - stop work immediately, keep people away, minimise the spread of contamination and get advice on what to do next
- Never use high pressure waterspray, compressed air or power tools on asbestos or suspected asbestos materials
- Always wear the correct personal protective equipment (PPE) when working with asbestos materials
- All asbestos removal work over 10 square metres must be done by either a Class A or Class B licensed company
- All friable asbestos must be removed by a Class A licensed asbestos removalist.

Content provided courtesy of the Ministry of Education. For more information, visit: www.education.govt.nz, and www.worksafe.govt.nz/asbestos.

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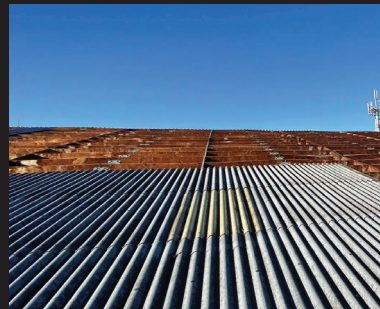
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