



# Learning in residential care: A guide for leaders and teachers

Children and young people who are placed in Oranga Tamariki residential care are among the most at risk of poor outcomes later in life. Education can change that. The education students receive in residence has the power to reconnect them to their learning and change their lives. ERO talked to students, teachers, leaders and social workers, as well as government representatives and the three providers of residential care, to find out about how well education is going in these settings. We found that some elements are going well, and there are areas that need to improve. Students in residential care want to learn, and the work that you do is critical to their life outcomes. This report gives examples of good practice for you to use.

This short guide is for leaders and teachers that work with students in residential care draws from ERO's new report: *Learning in Residential Care, 'They knew I wanted to learn'*. It:

- shares what we heard from the young people we talked to
- describes what we heard from teachers and leaders
- shares what research tells us about what good education provision for these students looks like
- gives 'big picture' findings about how well everyone is working together to help these students learn, and where improvements could be made
- sets out actions you can take to strengthen teaching and learning in residential care
- shares what our recommendations are for improvement overall.

## What do we know works?

Education in residential care has the most impact when everyone involved has clear, shared understandings of what good education provision looks like, and systems and resources are in place to support teachers.

Research here and internationally tells us that students in residential care benefit the most when there is:

- quality transitions in and out of residence
- support for their education needs
- appropriate pedagogy and meaningful curriculum
- positive, nurturing relationships and environments
- whānau or caregiver involvement in their learning
- effective leadership and a focus on improvement in the school.

## What students told us

Staff are building strong relationships with the students. The students were positive about their learning and they told us that the relationships that teaching staff develop with them are positive and nurturing. Ninety-two percent of students agreed that their teachers help them to learn.

“I haven’t been told I’m anything or somebody as much as I have in here.”

“Some boys here see teachers as a burden – that changes here.”

Students identified their learning outcomes as “the best thing about learning here”. Ninety percent agreed that they are learning things that will help them when they leave the residence.

They told us they liked the progress they had made in their learning. They also talked about how learning in residential care built their self-belief.

“A lot of certificates... very proud of them. Before I came here, I didn’t know what credits were.”

However, we also heard that for some students that there was a mismatch in the quantity and difficulty of work they are expected to complete. Students in residential care sit fewer achievement standards than they do outside residence, which can limit their pathways.

Some students will have better pathways if they sit more achievement standards or higher-level vocational standards while in residential care.

Students said they would like more whānau or significant adult involvement in their learning, particularly sharing their educational achievements.

“I think our family should receive a report of how we are achieving. I want to make my mum proud. Isn’t it every family’s main priority to see how their kid is doing?”

“[This residence] got me back to year levels where I need to be.”

## What leaders and teachers told us

We heard from teachers that individualised learning plans played a big part in their teaching decisions. They had a focus on involving students in directing their own learning pace, content and goals.

Teachers were asked to identify what would help them to achieve better outcomes for their students. The main things you identified were:

- better collaboration and communication across the system. This included collaboration and communication about the students’ care and about the students’ previous educational experiences
- access to professional learning and development opportunities, to teach students who have experienced trauma, how to support students to navigate the secondary qualification system and how to support students in specific-subjects, like literacy and numeracy

- more involvement in student transitions out of residence. For example, building relationships with social workers who support learners beyond the residence, more planning for transitions, more collaboration in transitions, and a wider range of education options for students
- more curriculum or subject offerings that connect to student interests and passions.

These views highlight the challenges teachers face working in a residential environment. We saw examples of good practice where teachers were able to overcome these challenges and provide high quality teaching.

## How well are things going in education providers?

We visited eight sites and across the eight sites we saw considerable variability in practice. In two of the eight sites ERO has recommended providers take immediate action to improve provision.

This is not a new finding. Over the last decade ERO has reviewed education for these priority students and consistently found that the quality of education they receive is too variable and too dependent on where in the country they are.

We saw some strengths and examples of good practice in the residences: students were generally positive about the transition into residential care, with many describing it as a positive, welcoming experience. The emotional environment that teachers provided was also largely positive – the relationships that teaching staff develop with students were positive and nurturing.

Sitting behind this good practice was a committed workforce of professionals who advocate for students.

Yet, commitment isn't enough – achieving good outcomes requires consistent quality teaching practice. In some sites we saw a capable workforce and well-developed education provision. However, there was variability across sites and areas of concern.

## What did we find?

ERO's evaluation had seven key findings:

1. Students in residential care are positive about their learning. Their pass rate of NZQA assessments attempted is high when in residence but they are often studying credits with limited pathways.
2. Students' learning is disrupted and disconnected as they transition between provision.
3. There is no agreed education model or a clear picture of what high quality education looks like for these students.
4. The model of education provision in residences makes it harder to grow expertise and is contributing to high levels of variability of provision.
5. There is a commitment to improving outcomes for Māori and culturally responsive practice, but practice is variable.
6. There is some good practice and some workforce capability to support positive educational outcomes.
7. There is a lack of opportunities for whanau and caregivers to connect to their children's learning.

## How can we shift things?

Based on this evaluation we have identified three action areas to raise the quality of education for these priority students.

### Area 1: To improve the quality of the students' education while in residence ERO recommends:

- developing a quality practice framework
- making available specialist training and professional networks
- enabling information to follow the student.

## Area 2: To grow expertise and reduce variability of provision ERO recommends:

- re-examining the model of provision and developing options for a new model. Options should include:
  - an overarching (Tuakana) provider with local (Teina) sites
  - a strong network of providers.

## Area 3: To increase students access to high quality education after leaving residence ERO recommends:

- considering education navigators to support student pathways
- earlier planning for pathways after residence
- investigating additional in-school support for students.

While some these changes require government to make some decisions, there changes that you can make right now.

Under each area of practice our report highlights describes examples of good practice that you can draw on to improve the quality of teaching in your provider.

These include:

- involve whānau more in your students education
- improving your practices to be be more culturally responsive to Māori
- starting to plan for students education when they leave residence, when they first arrive.

## If you want to find out more about our evaluation on learning in residential care, you can read our reports:

- *Learning in Oranga Tamariki Residential care: 'They knew I wanted to learn'*
- [ERO Special Review: Kingslea School](#)
- [ERO Special Review: Central Regional Health School \(Te Au Rere a Te Tonga: Epuni\)](#)
- [ERO Special Review: Te Poutama Ārahi Rangatahi](#)

We appreciate the work of all those who supported this evaluation, particularly the students, whānau, social workers, teachers and leaders who shared with us. Their experiences and insights are at the heart of what we have learnt. You can find the full reports on learning in residential care, along with a short summary of the findings, on ERO's website [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).



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