



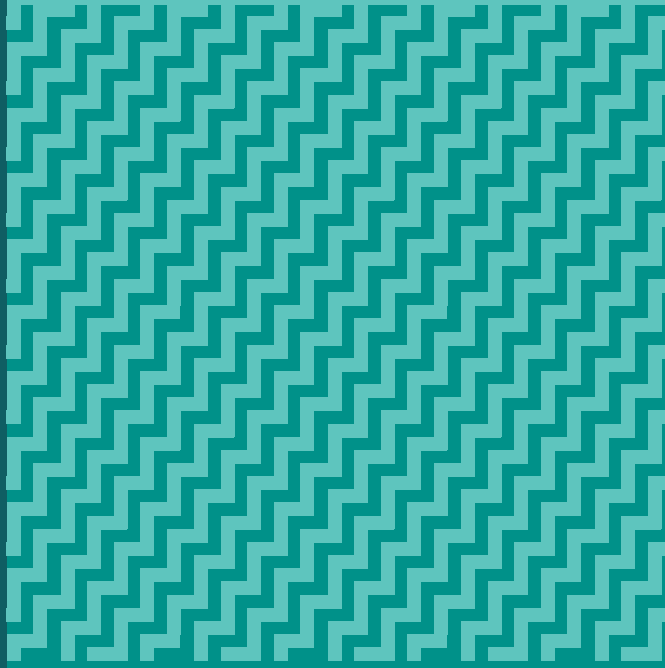
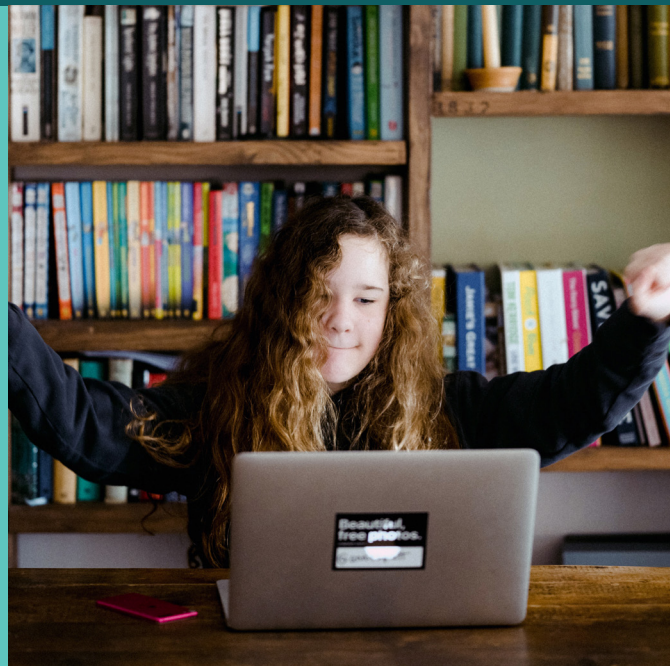
EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu

Education Review Report 5 November 2021

Profile Number: 498

Location: Wellington



Executive Summary

Context

Te Kura has been part of Aotearoa New Zealand's education system for almost 100 years. Its role has continued to evolve in response to changing needs and trends of this education system. Provision of distance education to ākongā in isolated and rural communities no longer defines the school's primary purpose, although the school remains an important access point for over 400 geographically isolated ākongā.

Te Kura is now playing a significant and increased role in the education of at-risk and disengaged ākongā, many of whom are Māori. At the core of this shift are rising rates of student disengagement and alienation from our education system. Education agencies are placing greater reliance on Te Kura as a place of enrolment for non-enrolled and high needs ākongā whose needs are not being met elsewhere.

Te Kura's provision and challenges

At the centre of Te Kura's provision for its ākongā is personalised learning and a curriculum that is tailored to their pace, interests, and readiness to learn. It has sound pedagogy and digital teaching capability. Te Kura has continued to diversify and improve its curriculum, its digital platforms and student support capacity and capability. Its delivery systems are agile and respond quickly to rapid shifts in enrolments. It is an improvement-focused organisation and is self-aware.

A school-wide priority focuses on engaging ākongā back into education and responding to their individual wellbeing needs. Te Kura can show ongoing gains in student

engagement levels across the school, and in NCEA achievement at all levels for its full-time ākongā. Raising the achievement of these highly vulnerable and at-risk ākongā has become more challenging, however.

Te Kura faces constraints in the level of targeted additional learning support it can access and provide to its ākongā. Many ākongā have high levels of unmet social, education and health needs. The support they need Te Kura to provide is time and resource intensive. Te Kura is stretched in doing this in relation to being a distance provider and with the resources available to it under current policy and funding settings. Within this, Te Kura has extended its learning support systems and capabilities and is offering more face-to-face learning opportunities closer to ākongā and whānau.

System settings

Current policy and system settings do not adequately reflect the changing composition of the roll and/or the learning needs of its students. Unlike other schools, there is no adjustment in funding rates for Te Kura to help address the disadvantage that many of their full-time and young adults face. The funding and learning support settings are

neither sufficient nor sustainable for Te Kura to effectively meet the needs of its diverse roll.

Entitlements to learning support and access to specialist expertise are not available to ākongā at Te Kura on an equivalent basis as elsewhere in the system. Ākongā with moderate and high additional learning support needs are disadvantaged in this respect when they are enrolled at Te Kura. It is inequitable that some of our most disadvantaged and at-risk ākongā are accessing a part of the system with the least support.

MoE is currently revising the equity-based funding system that applies across the schooling system and the support available for learners with high and complex learning needs. Both of these reviews should help address the inequities of current funding policies at Te Kura.

Opportunities for further contribution to the system

Increasing reliance is being placed on Te Kura by MoE to enrol rising numbers of disengaged and at-risk ākongā. Local schooling options are becoming more difficult to arrange. Some schools are reluctant to enrol such high needs ākongā, due in part to the demands they are managing on already stretched student support systems.

It is important that MoE continue to refine its referral practices and how it works with other agencies, to reduce lags in student re-enrolment. Involving Te Kura earlier as placement decisions are considered should benefit ākongā by facilitating faster transitions back into education.

ERO suggests that further policy and practice changes be explored by education agencies to see how Te Kura can be part of wider responses to reducing ākongā disengagement. Te Kura could partner more directly with schools through the dual registration policy to help retain and reintegrate ākongā before they disengage from their local schools.

There is a clear role for Te Kura in the education of diverse and at-risk ākongā. Meeting the needs of these ākongā should be a whole-of-system responsibility. There needs to be confidence that such referrals to Te Kura are in the best interests of ākongā and that the rest of the system is doing all it can to retain and engage its ākongā.

Te Kura's role in the system

This evaluation highlights the significance of roll and role changes at Te Kura and how the school is responding and adapting to meet the additional needs of at-risk ākongā. It also highlights a range of opportunities where Te Kura can play a wider role in the education system. These raise some broader questions for MoE and Te Kura to consider together:

Is the current role expected of Te Kura sustainable and is Te Kura the best place for referring such growing numbers of ākongā with the highest needs?

What should be expected from the rest of NZ's schooling system to better prevent and support students disengaging from education?

What is the long-term role and direction expected of Te Kura in our education system? Is it clear and well communicated?

Background

The Chief Review Officer has authorised this review as part of the Education Review Office cycle of reviewing and reporting on the quality of schooling in New Zealand. This review fulfils the statutory responsibilities of the Chief Review Officer.

The 2015 ERO review of Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura), evaluated the quality of provision and outcomes for ākongallearners within Te Kura. Te Kura has made very good progress against many of the recommendations of the 2015 report.

This review in 2021, is an evaluation in relation to specific terms of reference including evaluation objectives and priorities, as agreed by the Chief Review Officer and the Board of Te Kura.

The evaluation design and review priorities, developed in partnership with Te Kura as part of a participatory evaluation approach, defines the core intent of the evaluation.

This report summarises the evaluation of the quality of the education provision for ākongā at Te Kura in the context of its unique role and position in the education system. It also considers how well the current education system settings and implementation practices enable Te Kura to meet the needs of its ākongā and the government's overall expectations of Te Kura.

This report includes recommendations for Te Kura and other education agencies (including the Ministry of Education) and identifies opportunities for improving outcomes for ākongā at Te Kura. It also highlights opportunities where Te Kura can contribute more widely to the education system.

Evaluation Objectives and Priorities

The evaluation objectives are to:

- provide evaluative information to the board, and to the public, about the quality of the current education provision offered by Te Kura, including equity of access and outcomes for ākongā, and;
- identify the opportunities, strengths, and challenges for the school in its operation in the wider education system.

As a result, the evaluation considers the settings that Te Kura operates within and how they support it to best meet the needs of ākongā.

Key priority areas and subsequent questions were identified for investigation, evaluation and reporting in relation to children aged between two and six years (early learning) and schooling (five years to young adults).

The evaluation findings are reported under the following five key areas:

- Outcomes and experiences for Te Kura's ākongā and their whānau, for Māori and other high priority ākongā.
- Quality and effectiveness of education provision at Te Kura and how well digital platforms and delivery support these.

- Interactions with the wider education system and how these together with the settings within which Te Kura works, enable it to meet the needs of ākongā.
- Overall strategic direction of Te Kura and how well it is aligned to its priorities, to wider education trends, legislation, and system expectations.
- Opportunities for Te Kura to contribute to the education system and partnerships.
- exceptional arts or sports performance
- young parents
- overseas domestic students
- Oranga Tamariki (Ministry for Children)
- Corrections
- non-enrolled (including excluded or expelled)
- psychosocial or psychological grounds
- home educated students (fee-paying), and;
- students in the realm from the wider Pacific region and from health schools.

Context and role of Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu

Te Kura, formerly The Correspondence School, provides distance and face-to-face state education for ākongā from early childhood to National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 3. Ākongā are enrolled from across New Zealand and beyond.

Enrolment of ākongā is governed by section 68 of the Education and Training Act 2020 and is determined by the Ministry of Education (MoE) enrolment policy. This enrolment policy is reviewed as required by MoE and Te Kura.

Enrolment or registration with Te Kura is enabled through sets of criteria called gateways, some of which can be activated or expanded by the Secretary for Education according to need. There are currently 49 different sets of criteria for enrolment or registration with Te Kura. These include:

- geographical isolation
- itineracy
- high health needs
- special circumstances
- learning support needs
- young adult
- adult

Te Kura's vision for its ākongā is for them to achieve their educational and personal goals, enabling them to participate effectively as members of their communities. Aligned to this vision, Te Kura seeks to provide personalised, authentic learning for its ākongā.

Te Kura's roll is diverse. It includes ākongā who are geographically isolated, itinerant, or living overseas. Full-time enrolled ākongā also include those who have been alienated or excluded from a school, referred by Ministry of Education (MoE) Learning Support and Oranga Tamariki, and young parents. The majority of Te Kura's ākongā are of secondary school age. They include young adults (aged 16 to 19 years) as well as adults. Approximately 40% of Te Kura's current student enrolments are registered for dual tuition. This means they are enrolled in a local school and registered with Te Kura to access tuition in one to two subjects that are not available to them at their local school.

Te Kura operates from a central base in Wellington with its regional structure, managed through four offices in Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, and Christchurch. These offices service the Northern, Central North, Central South, and Southern regions respectively. The Overseas and Early Childhood teams are based in Wellington. There are smaller regional offices

in Whangarei, Tauranga, Rotorua, Hastings, Palmerston North, Nelson, and Dunedin.

Te Kura has the highest number of ākongā of any school in New Zealand. A significant proportion of ākongā are on the roll for a relatively short time. At the time of this review, mid 2021, it had 20,937 cumulative enrolments (a student may enrol more than once) with approximately 13,583 ākongā enrolled at any one time. Approximately 40% of these ākongā are dual registered with Te Kura and the rest are either full-time, early learners, fee payers, young adults or adult ākongā. Overall, 30% of ākongā identify as Māori and 7% as having Pacific heritage. The roll also includes ākongā who identify from a wide range of other ethnic groups.

In 2020 Te Kura received \$60.49 million in revenue. The greater majority of this was spent on staffing across all its student entry gateways.

Te Kura's full time roll is increasing significantly. Full time ākongā numbers have increased by over 40% since 2018, with significant increases between 2019 and 2021 (as at year to date). The number of dual registered ākongā at Te Kura has remained relatively stable in recent years, although it is trending upwards during 2021. The latest cumulative enrolment data for Te Kura has been included in this report (and was collected after the on-site stage of the review). This is to show the significant roll growth being experienced in the current year (to the end of August).

The most recent figures show that by 29 August 2021, the total cumulative roll at Te Kura has exceeded the full end-of-year roll for 2020. The proportion of at-risk ākongā within Te Kura's full-time cohort is increasing over time. MoE and Oranga Tamariki referred ākongā currently make up 72% of the 2021 YTD cumulative full-time enrolments. These referrals were 59% of the total full-time roll in 2018.

Te Kura is playing a significant role in the education system enrolling ākongā who have been disengaged from face-to-face schools. It is enrolling increasing numbers of at-risk and

Māori ākongā. Māori ākongā make up over 50% of the non-enrolled referrals. In 2020, Māori ākongā comprised 70% of those who come to Te Kura through the exclusion enrolment gateway.

Total enrolments at Te Kura, 2018 – 2021 (cumulative)

Headcount by enrolment type	2018	2019	2020	2021 (YTD, 29 Aug)
Full-time	3,658	4,069	5,020	5,153
Adults	2,233	2,154	1,973	2,071
Young Adults	5,301	5,834	6,154	5,511
Fee Payers	169	333	227	197
Dual years 1-8	455	535	458	445
Dual years 9-13	8,834	8,602	8,865	9,582
Early Childhood	537	494	501	499
TOTAL	21,187	22,021	23,198	23,458

Findings

1. Outcomes and experiences for Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu and their whānau, for Māori and other high priority ākonga

Early Childhood outcomes

Te Kura's valued outcomes, 'child and whānau engagement for personalised learning with a focus on equity of provision and access', are evident in the responsive and reciprocal partnerships with whānau Māori and all families. To effectively support children's learning, teachers deliberately scaffold the knowledge, skills and confidence of parents so they can notice, recognise and support children's learning and oral language development. Teaching practices are highly responsive to individual requirements, particularly those children with diverse learning needs.

Schooling outcomes

Introduction

Te Kura is adopting a holistic view of and approach to characterising ākonga outcomes. These are aligned to its newly implemented curriculum – Te Ara Pounamu. There are a clear set of progress indicators and expectations for teachers' assessment in relation to this. The move to continuous reporting to parents and ākonga on progress, engagement and achievement aligns with best practice and aligns to Te Ara Pounamu.

Engagement

In its 2021-2023 strategic plan, Te Kura has identified improved engagement, wellbeing, progress and achievement, and success for Māori and Pacific as priorities for its ākonga. The focus is specifically on engagement as a precursor to wellbeing, progress, and achievement. As part of internal monitoring and review, specific engagement metrics are used to know about, record and report engagement for ākonga individually, as groups and across the school.

Te Kura can show continuing positive trends in relation to this whole school engagement focus. Some examples from 2019 to mid-2021 for its most at-risk ākonga include:

- a small and steady improvement in My Te Kura (MTK-online learning platform) engagement, and;
- a five-percentage point increase in the number of students returning work for assessment.

These positive shifts are associated with the schoolwide (He Oranga Mahuru) strategy which is targeting at-risk ākonga. Te Kura has made good use of additional funding available to support these ākonga and deployed earlier strategies effective in raising engagement. Te Kura can show that across all seven groups in the school (ECH to Young Adults), engagement has increased by an average of five-percentage points from June 2019 to June 2021.

Strong evidence has been seen in the way engagement and some achievement information is aggregated, analysed and reported weekly. Further targeting and trend analysis over time ensues from this. Associated with this, suitable platforms have been developed and implemented to enable this measuring and monitoring.

My Korowai is an online environment for Kaimanaaki|Learning Advisers to get to know ākonga. It includes spaces for sharing personal information, goals and interests, leaving to learn activities and learner and teacher reflections. For ākonga in Years 11 to 13, 2020, engagement with My Korowai is very high (over 85%). This is an improvement since 2019 of five-percentage points on average across all priority groups (Māori, Pacific, young adult and full-time students).

My Te Kura is Te Kura's online teaching and learning platform. It allows ākonga and Kaimahi|staff to communicate, teach and learn in a virtual environment asynchronously and synchronously. It is a repository of over 26,000 learning objects. For ākonga in Years 1 to 15 in 2020 presence, as measured by use of My Te Kura, has increased from 2019 for all priority groups throughout the year, in most regions.

Achievement

A primary goal for Te Kura is to increase the number of ākonga re-engaging and continuing in education. Outcome aspirations for ākonga are paced at their individual readiness levels. There is flexibility in the way learning progressions are structured to the needs and interests of individuals. This can be seen for ākonga whose learning portfolios are structured so that they can learn at levels outside their age cohorts. For example, ākonga in Year 12 may have a goal of achieving NCEA Level 1 literacy and numeracy in one year, followed by achievement of Level 1 as a goal in the next year.

In 2020, the average NCEA standards achievement rate for full-time and young adult ākonga was 92%. This rate of achievement of standards (when ākonga are ready to take assessments) has been maintained between 2019 and 2020.

When comparing aspects of NCEA for Te Kura between 2019 and 2020, within an environment of overall school roll growth, the following are noted:

- Te Kura is offering more standards across more subjects.
- More standards are being awarded and more credits are being awarded (total count).
- There has been a small-to-modest positive shift in the proportion of non-dual registered ākonga (including full time, Young Adult, Fee Paying, Adult and Department of Corrections) achieving NCEA Levels 1-3 and University Entrance.
- Te Kura can show an increase in roll – based NCEA achievement at all levels for full time Māori ākonga.

For ākonga enrolled at Te Kura (excluding those dual-registered), the percentage attaining literacy and numeracy requirements across all NCEA levels has decreased from 2016 to 2020. In 2020, 46% of full-time ākonga and 83% of young adults attained NCEA literacy requirements; 39% and 80% of these ākonga respectively attaining the numeracy

requirements. Te Kura has identified this as an improvement focus area across the school.

School leaver outcomes are measurable through attainment of qualifications (NCEA and UE). At Te Kura, a decrease is evident in the proportion of ākongā leaving with qualifications over time (2015 – 2020). A greater proportion of Pacific ākongā are leaving Te Kura with NCEA Levels 1 to 3. Disparity in the achievement of school leaver qualifications remains significant, however, for Māori ākongā.

Te Kura has a very diverse and changing learner base, shown in the proportion of ākongā who enrol at Te Kura with no prior NCEA credits and the short length of time they stay on the roll. Just under half of full-time ākongā spend less than two years on the roll. More ākongā with greater educational needs are being referred by MoE. In 2019, 88% of full-time secondary level ākongā enrolling at the school had no prior NCEA credits. In this same year, 34% of ākongā left with no NCEA credits and 66% left with some or more than 80 NCEA credits.

Tertiary transitions

Ākongā transitions to tertiary education and training, within the first two years of leaving school, has trended downwards over the last five years at Te Kura. The fall in the transition rate was more significant for Māori ākongā. Their rates of transition to further post-school study within two years of leaving Te Kura decreased from 54% in 2015 to 45% in 2019. The equivalent transition rates for non-Māori and non-Pacific Te Kura school leavers were largely steady over this time, at 50-52%.

Transition to further post-school study over time for Te Kura ākongā, often occurs in subsequent years rather than shortly after they have left Te Kura. This can be seen in a further 22% of 2015 school leavers transitioning to tertiary over the following five years. By 2020, 75% of the 2015 school leaver cohort at Te Kura had transitioned to a post-school education pathway. Data is not yet available to view the full transition rates for Te Kura 2019 school leavers.

Te Kura has identified that transition rates to tertiary education or employment are affected by a complex combination of factors including individual, community and national contexts and have begun to scrutinise school leaver and transition information more deeply. School leaders acknowledge that there is scope to continue deeper analysis and to use school leaver data and qualifications to support planning around ākongā transitions and inform their internal evaluation.

Findings

2. The quality and effectiveness of education provision at Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu and how well it is supported by its digital platforms and delivery

Provisions for learners – Early Learning

Te Kura currently provides an early childhood distance education for 469 children aged between two to six years, 20% of whom are Māori. Children enrolled in early childhood education are from a diverse range of lifestyle and other backgrounds. Most early childhood ākonga are from rural areas and go on to attend their local primary school. Te Kura's philosophy for children prioritises working in partnership with parents and whānau.

Children's interests, strengths and abilities are the foundations for designing a personalised play-based curriculum. Well documented assessment informs individualised planning that uses a wide range of strategies and resources. Records of children's learning show:

- Noticing learning and progress.
- Skilful support for parents-as-teachers from Kaiako.
- Responding (through highlighting for parents the children's learning).
- Use of Te Whāriki, the early childhood curriculum, and more recently Te Ara Pounamu.

Kaiako have a strong collaborative culture and demonstrate a high level of professional subject knowledge to support children as successful learners. They proactively respond to children's home cultures and languages, particularly for tamariki Māori. There is a focus on evaluating the impact of teaching practices on outcomes for learners.

Kaiako should increase the extent to which the bicultural heritage of Aotearoa New Zealand is evident in the curriculum planned for non-Māori children.

Provisions for learners – Schooling

The curriculum is increasingly responsive to the needs of ākonga. This can be seen in the integrated curriculum options tailored to meet the holistic needs of ākonga. Those who are enrolled full-time benefit from the support of Kaimanaaki who provide an integral link between the learner and the learning. ERO found many examples of individuals well supported to engage and achieve at Te Kura.

Some ākonga reported to ERO that their education would have ceased and pathways to their future would have been cut off had they

not enrolled at Te Kura. Resources that support learning are responsive and targeted to student interest and need.

Personalised online delivery and Huinga Ako (Learning group meetings) in particular, provide positive experiences and increased engagement opportunities in education, for ākonga and their whānau. Huinga Ako are strongly relational and connection focused. This is of particular significance to those who have come to Te Kura through an at-risk gateway. Many ākonga along with their parents and whānau, attend and participate in face-to-face Huinga Ako, with some of these having specific curriculum focus areas. There has been an increase in the number and type of Huinga Ako offered and attended.

These Huinga Ako and other event days provide ākonga with connection to Te Kura and opportunities to engage and learn from each other. Learning continuity is well supported and a sense of belonging fostered. Overseas ākonga benefit from authentic, contextual learning opportunities that contribute meaningfully to their future qualifications and assessment.

Te Ara Pounamu, Te Kura's local curriculum, is newly developed, which included wide consultation, and well-considered. It captures the values and the entirety of the school's curriculum and is culturally located in te ao Māori. It is responsive to the wellbeing needs of ākonga and the remote nature of many of their connections within schooling communities. The guiding principles of Te Ara Pounamu are evident in practice.

Strengthening culturally-located, responsive curriculum and pedagogy has been an area of ongoing focus for Te Kura. The curriculum for many ākonga is authentic, deliberate, and culturally located in practice. Connections are made to the lives, prior understandings, knowledge and experiences of ākonga. Relational approaches are guided by Māori values and protocols and link strongly to supporting wellbeing. Some ākonga can see their language identity and culture reflected in what they learn and the way they learn. There

are further opportunities for this to be more widespread across the school, particularly for Māori ākonga.

There has been significant change in both the nature of the curriculum and its primary mode of delivery. Some Kaiako report 'initiative overload' with the ongoing development of online delivery systems, curriculum and changing enrolment trends. Leaders need reliable ongoing ways of knowing and responding to Kaimahi|staff perceptions about the pace and manageability of these changes.

Te Kura has an inclusive and individualised approach to engagement and learning. The learning culture is increasingly effective in supporting learner success. Increased opportunities have been created for ākonga to participate, engage in, and manage their own learning. Flexible time allows for ākonga to complete and submit tasks or make drop-box entries. This appeals to some students who they report feeling less stress in relation to deadlines. Online participation in learning meetings, whether one-to-one or by group, provides for a range of different modes of ākonga engagement.

Provision of learning support for ākonga has improved, to provide for more equitable outcomes. Careful consideration and review have informed a more devolved regional approach to learning support. This has led to development of internal capacity to better meet the needs of ākonga. Regional leaders of learning support are integral in enabling Kaimahi to provide personalised access to learning support for ākonga. Timely and sustainable employment of teacher aides is an ongoing challenge for Te Kura.

Digital provisions for learners

The primary mode of curriculum delivery is via distance learning. Te Kura has been working to establish the digital-enabled environment over the past few years. Deciding on the digital systems in which it should invest and implement has been complex and challenging

as reflected in the range and size of its roll and the diversity and complexity of some ākonga learning needs.

Digital provisions for learners – Early Learning

Kaiako and whānau make very good use of external online platforms to increase participation, engagement, make the curriculum accessible and to document children's learning and progress. Kaiako are highly responsive in seeking online pathways that will work best for individual families.

Kaiako scaffold the knowledge of whānau so they increasingly engage them and support learning through online curriculum delivery. Increased use of video conferencing and the option of videos has a positive impact on relationships and engagement with ākonga, families and whānau. Leaders are aware that further work is required to make the internal digital platform used by Te Kura more useful and

fit-for-purpose for children and families enrolled in early learning.

Digital provisions for learners – Schooling

Substantial progress has and is being made by Te Kura to improve its digital capability and capacity and to operate primarily as a digital distance provider. This can be seen in the way it is:

- embarking on a system-wide Information Technology (IT) architecture review – a 'village'
- transitioning to cloud platforms and services, improving data security, identity, and access management, and focusing on system and data interoperability
- planning for a new central data storage platform
- customising a Learning Management System into a personalised online learning platform

for Te Kura students – My Te Kura and My Korowai, and;

- addressing recommendations in an independent data governance report.

Going forward, some examples of innovations include:

- Moving to modularize content elements of curriculum so that they that can be aggregated to support learning themes/ topics – a shift from a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Systems to ensure a record of learning for individual learners keeps track of the content elements used.
- Building and connecting digital programme development alongside curriculum design.
- Continuing to trial innovative approaches to digital learning.

Changes within the digital delivery model are implemented through the teaching teams. There is improved on-boarding time and experience after enrolment for ākonga and whānau.

The focus of ensuring this is a personalised approach and experience for ākonga, is developing. Equity of access to digital provision is responded to quickly and practically. Te Kura has an assistance scheme for laptops and internet access which is able to support those ākonga most in need.

As Te Kura continues to evolve its digital systems and uses, the user interface design should be more closely considered and include:

- How well ākonga and whānau, can see themselves in it.
- How well ākonga can efficiently navigate within it.
- How well it works across the cohorts from early learning to young adults.

There is evidence of increased ākonga satisfaction and engagement linked to personalised design and responsiveness. Te Kura uses a variety of systems and measures to track and monitor ākonga engagement. The My Korowai learning interface focuses on a

more unified learning experience and agency for ākonga.

The engagement focus currently is on behavioural attributes such as time spent using the learning platform (My Te Kura), completion of set tasks and attendance at learning meetings. A next step is to consider additional measures of engagement that include cognitive measures (such as, student-agency and awareness of next steps) and further measures of emotional/wellbeing.

Some Kaimahi report 'initiative fatigue'. ERO observed a gap between innovation at the centre and experience of some Kaimahi and ākonga in the regions. It is important for Te Kura to continue to build digital and data literacy of Kaimahi to capture the benefits of the system.

Internal Evaluation

Te Kura is improvement focused, using extensive and comprehensive internal evaluation over the past few years. Useful information is gathered in relation to priority goals and identified improvement actions. There is thorough consideration of the impact of change for ākonga, whānau and Te Kura.

Te Kura makes good use of both internal and external evaluation. Responsiveness to evaluation recommendations leads to well-considered change. Effective conditions support internal evaluation. Findings from purposeful evaluation have been used to inform strategic priorities. Both qualitative and quantitative information is used to inform evaluation findings.

To further strengthen internal evaluation across early learning and schooling, leaders and Kaimahi should:

- Focus evaluation more clearly on outcomes for ākonga and understanding what works, why and for whom.
- Clearly identify what data/information will assist consideration of impacts

and identifying next steps for further improvement.

- Use collected, collated, and analysed data in regular review/evaluation cycles as appropriate.
- More deeply analyse some existing data sets to inform further developments.
- Provide more opportunities for the early learning teams to contribute to wider school developments.
- Build evaluation capacity and capability alongside new initiatives.

Transitions

Transition into, within and on from Te Kura is an area of deliberate ongoing focus. There was wide regional agency variation in the transition pathways for ākonga to be enrolled at Te Kura. For some ākonga, delays to ongoing learning are linked to the time and process involved to enroll in Te Kura. Where there are effective working relationships with MoE and Attendance Service providers, transition pathways generally took less time. Some non-enrolled ākonga wait significant times to enter Te Kura. Once enrolled, Te Kura's onboarding process is timely, efficient, and well defined.

Older ākonga are encouraged to participate in 'Leaving to Learn' (learning outside the school), a programme integral to Te Kura's curriculum Te Ara Pounamu. Some key features of this programme include:

- Connecting with the community.
- Exploring ākonga interests.
- Identifying a support network for ākonga.

'Leaving to Learn' is given priority according to the age of the ākonga, and their proximity to employment or to further learning pathways or their own aspirations.

Findings

3. Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu interactions with the wider education system and how these together with the settings that Te Kura works within, enables it to meet the needs of ākongā

Connections with the wider educational system/external agencies

In early learning, Kaiako work closely with other agencies to sensitively develop shared approaches for the provision of children with diverse learning needs, e.g., Public Health, MoE Learning Support, Rural Education Activities Programme, and other ECE sector contexts, including hospital-based and centre-based ECE providers. They have maintained a focus on planned community events – to promote a sense of belonging and to strengthen community connections for children and whānau, e.g., through playgroups and face-to-face Huinga Ako. ECE Kaimahi have identified that social media is a key strategy for roll growth going forward.

In schooling, Kaimahi work with many external agencies at the regional and local level to ensure ākongā receive effective individualised support and transition to education. Working relationships with MoE (and local attendance services) are critical to managing ākongā transitions to Te Kura, and in securing access to MoE funded learning support. In all regions, Kaimahi were actively strengthening their

relationships and communication with MoE to achieve stronger working partnerships.

Te Kura are active brokers of support with wider agencies on behalf of ākongā and whānau. For example, in accessing community based social and mental health services. Current policy settings for learning support, for example, mean that Te Kura's ability to access other forms of in-school support for ākongā wellbeing are constrained (discussed in a later section of this report). These connections to local external social agencies and iwi-based organisations are important.

Not all stakeholders can see or are aware of Te Kura's role and how it can support ākongā. Localised Huinga Ako and event days provide for more visible local connections. Te Kura is deliberately strengthening and widening its local partnerships to raise its profile, including with iwi organisations. Connections to iwi are particularly strong in Te Kura's Central North region.

Pacific ākongā have benefited from enrolment in Summer school and there is scope for Te Kura to build stronger partnerships with Pacific aiga, particularly considering its growing Pacific roll.

The system settings and implementation practice that shape Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu's delivery and role in the system

The system settings for Te Kura (such as its funding model, regulation of access and enrolment, access to learning support) all need to be reviewed so that ākongā can be better served when enrolled or registered with Te Kura. In current form, these are neither sustainable for Te Kura, nor equitable for ākongā.

An increasing proportion of ākongā enrolled at Te Kura face significant educational disadvantage. Many have high unmet needs for individualised learning support. The policies and practices that determine these settings are not always easily understood or communicated within the education system. Schools often do not know what is offered by or how to access Te Kura.

Funding model

The basis of the funding model for Te Kura has not been revisited since it was implemented in 2007. It does not reflect the subsequent changes in the composition of Te Kura's roll, or the high level of disadvantage and additional learning support required by a large proportion of Te Kura's full time and young adult roll. Te Kura does not receive any equity funding adjustments.

If these ākongā were enrolled in face-to-face schools, they would generate greater levels of individual and school-level entitlements.

Full time enrolments of at-risk ākongā at Te Kura have grown substantially over the past three years. This has continued to grow at an even faster rate in the 2021 cumulative year-to-date enrolments, as shown in the following table:

Full time enrolments at Te Kura, 2018 – 2021 (cumulative)

Headcount by gateway	2018	2019	2020	2021 (YTD, 2 Sep)
Non-enrolled	779	1,114	1,846	2,124
Psychological/ psycho-social	1,001	1,078	1,109	1,146
Exclusion/ Expulsion	321	406	468	418
Oranga Tamariki	75	71	64	76
Young Parent	80	65	51	26
Itineracy	348	359	390	418
Geographic	412	401	462	451
Overseas	544	564	548	473
Exceptional Arts and Sports	97	105	97	99

Current funding rates are not sufficient or sustainable for what is needed by Te Kura to meet the diverse needs of this growing roll. Te Kura faces considerable pressure in teacher workload as it operates within current teacher ratios and funding levels. Funding disbursement as three instalments across the year also means that it is challenging for Te Kura to adjust and plan for staffing levels throughout the year, ahead of enrolment surges and daily changes.

Te Kura has been agile in its use of core resourcing and in directing short-term additional funding (for example, funding connected to the impacts of COVID-19) to provide additional support to its high risk/high needs ākongā. Short-term programme funding means it is a challenge for Te Kura to build longer-term capacity and to respond to the increasing numbers of disadvantaged ākongā.

MoE acknowledges that a review of funding for Te Kura is a priority. The planned

redevelopment of the current equity funding system for the schooling sector should go some way to address the disadvantage faced by many ākongā at Te Kura.

Learning support

Entitlements and access to additional learning support for ākongā at Te Kura are not equivalent to that of regular school settings. Funding for the highest needs ākongā once they transition to Te Kura is reduced. Ākongā with moderate needs are not able to access the services associated with the new Learning Support Delivery model or referrals to MoE specialist services.

Te Kura responds to ākongā with high to moderate learning support needs from core funding delivered through its regional learning support teams. The inequity of learning support provision places pressure on Kaimahi and whānau to respond to ākongā needs. This pressure is exacerbated by the increasing numbers of referrals of highest need and high/moderate needs ākongā to Te Kura.

MoE is currently reviewing the support available for learners with high and complex needs.

Enrolment policies and their administration

Enrolment policies should be more flexibly designed and implemented and have a greater focus on equity of access. This would support Te Kura to respond to ākongā more quickly and effectively.

Some ākongā can be disadvantaged by the requirements of some enrolment criteria, such as those of the psychological and psychosocial gateway. Referrals under this gateway require specialist assessments by MoE educational psychologists. Māori ākongā are under-represented in this gateway, yet they make up a high proportion of the at-risk referrals from MoE. These assessments provide valuable

information for Te Kura to use in preparing and supporting ākongā in their transitions.

The equity of access for Māori to such assessments and, potentially for other ākongā with high needs referred through other at-risk gateways, is an ongoing challenge at Te Kura.

The enrolment gateways are numerous. MoE, schools and other agencies do not always know who can be enrolled at Te Kura or what gateway might best fit specific ākongā/whānau circumstances. Significant numbers and proportions of ākongā referred through the at-risk gateways experience long periods of time outside of the education system before being enrolled at Te Kura. Referrals can be complex and reaching agreement about which education pathway best suits ākongā and whānau can be time consuming.

There is considerable regional variation in the time taken by MoE to complete these referrals. The timing of referrals depends on the availability of local education enrolment options, as well as their suitability for meeting the needs of ākongā and whānau. Long delays impact directly on ākongā engagement, retention, and consequent success in their learning at Te Kura. Management of referrals to Te Kura improved in some regions in 2020, in response to the disruption of COVID-19 and increased MoE resources. In some regions these shifts in practice have been sustained into 2021.

Ākongā, once referred to Te Kura, sometimes come with little supporting information about their learning needs or prior educational achievement, particularly those referred via the alienated/non-enrolled gateway. It is therefore more challenging for Te Kura to engage these ākongā and develop appropriate personalised learning programmes.

There are regional differences in the degree of active monitoring/review of referred ākongā and dialogue with Te Kura about their progress. ERO observed several examples of good practice where partnerships between MoE and Te Kura work effectively for ākongā.

Findings

4. The overall strategic direction of Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu, and how well it is aligned to its priorities, and to wider education trend changes, legislation, and system expectations

Many examples of good practice in the governance and leadership of Te Kura are evident. There is strong alignment of Te Kura's strategic direction and the delivery of its priorities. Progress against the strategic plan is actively monitored, reported, and discussed at board level and throughout all levels of the school.

Senior regional leadership demonstrates commitment to raising the profile of early learning within the organisation, including the board. Early learning priorities have been included in overall/regional strategies. More opportunities should be provided for the early learning team to access and use resources and contribute to wider school developments.

The board actively reviews the outcomes of major change initiatives and scrutinises internal policies and procedures to ensure the school meets its legal obligations. It undertakes regular reviews of its own practices, including of board committees. In 2020, the board commissioned an external audit of its governance practices.

The board proactively seeks ideas for improvement and innovation. It regularly engages with Kaimahi and sector stakeholders in the regions and meets with whānau and

ākonga to hear about their experiences at Te Kura and how improvements can be made.

The board regularly considers education sector issues and anticipates these both operationally and strategically. Te Kura responds to system-wide strategies and expectations, such as the National Education Learning Priorities, Ka Hikitia, Tau Mai Te Reo and the Pacific Education Action Plan. These are reflected in Te Kura's strategic plan and include clear priorities and action plans for building success for Māori and Pacific ākonga.

Te Kura is working positively towards becoming a bilingual school. Kaimahi are actively supported to develop their te reo and me ngā tikanga Māori. Steady progress is being made to embed Te Tiriti o Waitangi across the school and in teaching and learning.

Te Kura is responsive and quickly adapts to changes in enrolment demand and to unexpected crises. This was evident in the

rapid responses to support schools and ākonga negatively affected through COVID-19. The board and the senior leadership team see Te Kura as having a wider role in the education system as a distance education provider and seek opportunities to engage with MoE and sector stakeholders on its potential contribution.

Te Kura is reconceptualising its digital infrastructure to provide an integrated, digital learning ecosystem. This supports equitable, open distance learning and curriculum changes underway. This approach is consistent with industry best practice 1,2,3, and aligns with the strategic direction being taken by MoE and other parts of the education sector.

Te Kura's alignment with and anticipation of wider education developments would be further strengthened by more regular and focused dialogue between Te Kura and MoE and with the sector. A stronger reciprocal relationship with MoE would assist Te Kura in this. MoE's strategic oversight of Te Kura's role in the education system should be more visible. Clearer coordination, within MoE, of the policy and operational settings that shape Te Kura's role, would also strengthen its contribution to the system.

Findings

5. The opportunities for Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu to contribute to the education system and partnerships

ERO sought a range of views from the sector, stakeholders, MoE and the board about the opportunities for Te Kura's contribution in the education system. The key themes centred on the following opportunities:

- Earlier and faster re-engagement of at-risk ākonga into Te Kura to improve their engagement rates, progress and learning outcomes.
- Building sector understanding of and confidence in using Te Kura's dual registration gateways for at-risk ākonga to support their retention and reintegration in their existing school.
- Māori ākonga success at Te Kura being better supported as a system priority.
- Te Kura as a contributor to national education system resilience and response to crises.
- Te Kura as a potential resource of quality assured, curriculum aligned educational content.
- Pedagogy that can be made available across multiple platforms, for wider use and benefit in the system.

Improving engagement of at-risk ākonga at Te Kura

Some immediate opportunities can be realised within current settings, such as through:

- Earlier referrals of ākonga to Te Kura and more consistency in this process across MoE regions.
- Providing comprehensive information about individual ākonga in referral processes.
- More systematic monitoring and review of ākonga progress by MoE and Te Kura.
- Earlier signalling by schools to MoE, when ākonga are at risk of disengagement.
- Stronger partnerships between schools, Te Kura, and MoE to prevent further disengagement of at-risk ākonga from face-to-face schools.

Greater use of dual registration at Te Kura to help retain ākongā in the system

Te Kura currently supports over 9,000 ākongā through dual registrations. Using dual registrations more flexibly to retain and reintegrate ākongā within their existing schools has yet to be used widely. A reintegration enrolment gateway already exists for this purpose, but it is not well known or used to any extent. Some of the COVID-19 responses successfully supported at-risk ākongā in their existing schools through dual registration with Te Kura.

Schools need better understanding of, and confidence in, how to work with Te Kura and support ākongā in part-time study. This was raised with ERO by the sector and other stakeholders. Often schools have had no direct experience with Te Kura. There is scope for MoE to work in partnership with Te Kura to help broker this uptake and understanding to benefit ākongā.

Opportunities for Māori ākongā

Achieving equitable and excellent educational provision for ākongā Māori at a system level has been a long-standing challenge in Aotearoa New Zealand. Te Kura has the highest number of vulnerable ākongā Māori on its roll and the largest number of full-time Māori of any school in New Zealand. For many of these ākongā, Te Kura may be their last school education pathway and opportunity for engaging in formal learning.

Lifting the engagement and success of these ākongā is a considerable challenge given the level of disaffection many may have experienced in the education system. The personalised approach that Te Kura offers each ākongā, along with its local curriculum and wrap around support helps build confidence, trust and engagement in learning for these ākongā and their whānau. Te Kura is focusing on providing more support to Māori ākongā. It is

broadening its connections with whānau and iwi and other agencies working with Māori, as well as its own internal capability and capacity. With appropriately targeted additional resources (as demonstrated through TK400, the Big Picture Pilot and Intensive Te Kura Big Picture) Te Kura is better placed to lift success for Māori ākongā.

A wider set of responses beyond Te Kura is needed, however, to respond to the needs of Māori ākongā. There needs to be confidence that such referrals to Te Kura are in the best interests of ākongā, that they are getting the support they need and that the rest of the system is doing all it can to retain and engage its ākongā. This needs to be a whole-of-system responsibility.

Opportunities to support system resilience and response to crises

Te Kura has a role in supporting the resilience of the education system. Many enrolment gateways already allow for this. COVID-19 required a broader set of immediate responses to system needs. Te Kura has played a part in this, responding quickly to MoE requests and offering a range of ways to support ākongā in the system. This included use of its Summer School and new crisis intervention programmes TK400 and ClassroomNZ2020. These programmes were supported by strengthened partnerships and resourcing in MoE regions. There are opportunities for MoE and Te Kura to learn from these responses for future needs.

Te Kura has considerable strengths and experience in curriculum design and in digital infrastructure development to support distance and remote learning. The digital infrastructure and approach adopted by Te Kura are regarded as consistent with industry best practice and in alignment with the direction taken by MoE and other parts of the sector. Te Kura could be a source of reference and potential influence for sector change, and support MoE as a champion of change.

Provision for international students

The Education Review Office reviews schools that are signatories to the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice 2016 (the Code) established under section 534 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

Te Kura has completed its 2020 annual review of its implementation against the Code and submitted this to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority. At the time of this review there were four international students from China enrolled at Te Kura. They are dual enrolled at a local secondary school. These were international students who were not able to return to their own countries due to COVID-19.

A Chinese speaking Kaiako from Te Kura communicates directly with international ākongā and their whānau as required. The pastoral care for these students is managed through their base school as per the Dual Provider Partnership Agreement with Te Kura.

Board assurance on legal requirements

Before the review, the board of trustees and principal of the school completed the ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- board administration
- curriculum
- management of health, safety, and welfare
- personnel management
- financial management, and;
- asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on student achievement:

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)
- physical safety of students
- teacher registration
- processes for appointing staff
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions
- attendance, and;
- school policies in relation to meeting the requirements of the Children's Act 2014.

Te Kura complies with the requirements of the ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists. It is responsive to legislative requirements and MoE (and other agency) expectations and good practice guidelines.

Policies, procedures, and practices are responsive to the Te Kura context and changes occurring within this as a distance provider that uses a blended approach of online and face-to-face provision. Monitoring of implementation of various procedures is systematic and reporting is regular to the senior leadership team and board about implementation of procedures and any issues arising.

Conclusions

Te Kura's roll and role in New Zealand's education system is significantly changing. Its roll has increased, specifically in the numbers of full time and at-risk ākonga. Te Kura now has a greater proportion of students who have become disengaged and alienated from education in New Zealand. Education agencies are placing greater reliance on Te Kura as a place of enrolment for non-enrolled and high needs ākonga whose needs are not being met elsewhere.

Te Kura provides a personalised curriculum for its ākonga using sound digital teaching and learning capabilities and face-to face learning opportunities. It adapts and responds quickly to rapid shifts in enrolments. Re-engaging students in education and supporting their wellbeing is a school priority. Ongoing modest gains in student engagement and achievement can be seen across the school. Raising full-time student qualification acquisition is a persistent challenge, as is the growing number of students requiring additional learning support. Te Kura has strengthened its learning support systems and capacity.

Current policy and system settings are neither sufficient nor sustainable for Te Kura to effectively meet the needs of its diverse roll. It is inequitable that some of NZ's most disadvantaged and at-risk ākonga are accessing a part of the system with the least support. Opportunities to adjust Te Kura's funding should be prioritised in planned MoE policy reviews of the equity funding system and of its support for learners with high and complex needs.

MoE referral practices should better optimise students' chances to re-engage successfully in education. Opportunities should be explored and actioned to increase Te Kura's participation when risks of disengagement are identified at an earlier stage.

There is a clear role for Te Kura in the education of diverse and at-risk ākonga. A wider set of responses is needed beyond Te Kura. Meeting the needs of these ākonga should be a whole-of-system responsibility. There needs to be confidence that such referrals to Te Kura are in the best interests of ākonga, that they are getting the support they need and that the rest of the system is doing all it can to retain and engage its ākonga.

As Te Kura's role in the system continues to shift there is a risk that opportunities to leverage its broader experience and connections in the education system are overlooked. The breadth and depth of its role may not be sufficiently visible and understood by the education sector. Greater clarity and direction is needed from MoE on how it sees the long-term role of Te Kura evolving.

Recommendations

To bring about the necessary improvements to promote equity and excellence for ākongā at Te Kura, ERO recommends that Te Kura:

- Ensure that the models of teaching and learning are manageable and sustainable to meet new curriculum delivery expectations and tailored responses to individual ākongā needs. This should include providing more support and opportunity for Kaimahi involvement in changes in curriculum, pedagogy, and digital systems, and continuing to embed te ao Māori across the school.
- Strengthen digital capability and capacity. More specifically:
 - build an internal research and evidence base of what works in terms of digital/online teaching and learning and link this with international best practice
 - establish a fully developed Digital (IT) Strategic Plan to achieve coherence across future IT developments and underpin long-term investment decisions
 - continue to strengthen the digital and data literacy of Kaimahi to capture the benefits of the systems that have been established at Te Kura, and;
 - liaise with MoE and other education sector agencies, to achieve alignment of their digital architecture with developments in the wider education sector
- Focus internal evaluation across early learning and schooling more on outcomes for ākongā, to determine impact. This should include undertaking a deeper analysis of some existing and new data sets to inform improved understanding of outcomes and broaden the range of metrics to understand engagement, including cognitive and behavioural indicators.

- Strengthen partnerships with MoE including seeking formal protocols for the management of referrals of ākongā to Te Kura.

For the Ministry of Education

To bring about the necessary improvements to promote equity and excellence for ākongā at Te Kura, and to fully use the potential of Te Kura's resources and expertise within the education system, ERO recommends that MoE:

Review Te Kura's funding as a matter of priority in the context of the redevelopment of equity funding for the school system. This should include considering how funding allocations equitably reflect the changing composition of Te Kura's roll and the level of disadvantage and diverse needs of many ākongā.

Assess how access to learning support, particularly for those ākongā with high and moderate needs, can be improved as part of MoE's review of support for learners with high and complex needs. In doing this, consider how levels of learning support for ākongā at Te Kura can be aligned equitably to those available to ākongā with similar needs enrolled in face-to-face schools.

In the context of the review of alternative education, reassess Te Kura's role in the delivery of education for disengaged and alienated ākongā.

Work with Te Kura to formalise and strengthen relationships between the school and MoE within MoE response and delivery systems to optimise enrolment referrals and improve consistency of practice across MoE regions.

Provide greater clarity and direction on the long-term role expected of Te Kura as a national education provider and its contribution to the wider education system. This includes developing greater sector understanding and visibility of the support that Te Kura can provide to the rest of the system, such as in times of crisis, its responses for at-risk learners, and in leveraging its experience in curriculum and digital and distance education more broadly.



Jane Lee
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5 November 2021

About the School

The Education Counts website provides further information about the school's student population, student engagement and student achievement. educationcounts.govt.nz/home

