



Briefing report

Education Review Office (ERO): Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu - review findings and recommendations

Date	1 November 2021
Security Level	N/A
ERO Priority	Medium
ERO Reference	M21-107
Date requested	ERO initiated
Date due	ERO initiated
Proactive release	Recommended

Addressee	Action sought	Deadline
Associate Minister of Education	<p>It is recommended that you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Note the attached ERO report. b) Note that ERO intends to publish this report in the week beginning the 22nd of November 2021. c) Note through the course of this review ERO has identified several system wide issues that it has signalled as requiring urgent policy and practice attention – most notably the rapid expansion in the referral of Disengaged and alienated learners to Te Kura. d) Agree to forward a copy of this report to Minister Hipkins, Associate Minister Davis and Associate Minister Sio. e) Note that this briefing is recommended for proactive release following the publication of the report. 	



Attachments:

**Education Review Office (ERO):
Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu - review
findings and recommendations**



Comments:

Minister's Office to complete	
Noted	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seen	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approved	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referred to:	
Date signed by Minister:	



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Our Ref: M21-107

1 November 2021

Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu - review findings and recommendations

Purpose

1. We have previously discussed our provisional findings and recommendations with you from the review of Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura). The review is completed, and the report is now at the draft stage.
2. This briefing sets out the review process, review findings, the next steps for improvement for Te Kura and our recommendations to the Ministry of Education (the Ministry).

Background

3. Te Kura was established as 'The Correspondence School'. It provides distance education and face-to-face state education for ākonga from early childhood to National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 3. It is now a large and diverse school experiencing rapid growth in its full-time roll. 23,198 ākonga were enrolled in December 2020. In 2020 annual government funding into Te Kura sat at \$51m and other revenue sources generating an additional \$9.4m. Government funding for the school increased by \$4.5m between 2019 and 2020.
4. Its role has evolved in response to changing needs and trends in the education system. Its provision of distance learning for ākonga in isolated and rural communities no longer defines the school's primary purpose, although the school remains an important access point for geographically isolated ākonga.
5. ERO last evaluated the quality of provision and outcomes for ākonga | learners in Te Kura in 2015. Since then, very good progress has been made against many of the recommendations of the 2015 ERO report.
6. Te Kura is playing a significant and increased role in the education of disengaged, alienated, and high needs ākonga, many of whom are Māori. This growth is mostly concentrated in the Auckland, Northland, and Hawkes Bay regions. The numbers of at-risk ākonga have nearly doubled since 2017 and have continued to increase in 2021.

Review process

7. The evaluation design and review priorities, developed in partnership with Te Kura as part of a participatory evaluation approach, defined the core intent of the evaluation.
8. The review was tailored to match the unique context of the school as a national provider within the education system. A bespoke evaluation framework design was informed by the expertise of senior evaluators from ERO's Te Ihuwaka (the Centre for Education Evaluation). This took into account the system settings and the environment Te Kura operates within.
9. The evaluation:
 - Provides 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.
 - Identifies the opportunities, strengths, and challenges for the school in its operation in the wider education system.
10. The evaluation included an in-depth investigation of Te Kura's digital capacity, capability and provision.
11. The process recognised the Ministry as the policy setter, the regulator, and the controller of referrals to the school.
12. ERO assigned a specialist team with relevant expertise, knowledge, and experience to the review. The comprehensive inquiry took place over several weeks and covered all regions of the country.
13. The team engaged with a range of stakeholders, including the Ministry.

Report Findings

14. How ākongā are engaging, progressing and achieving.
 - Te Kura has a holistic view of outcomes across the school and within the curriculum and are paced at learner readiness. Learners participate in assessments when they are ready rather than at a time aligned to their year group or age.
 - A number of indicators developed internally by Te Kura underpin knowledge of progress towards achievement. Presence, participation, achievement are used to track, monitor and support learners.
 - A high priority is placed on re-engaging ākongā in learning and in responding to their wellbeing needs. Learning was found to be individualized to meet the needs of learners.
 - Strategies and initiatives to raise engagement and achievement in learning are showing upward trends and steady improvement, particularly for those ākongā most at risk.

- Gaining an overall picture of achievement levels in NCEA across to Te Kura is a challenge, made complex by an increasing and changing roll, high and diverse needs of many ākonga short periods of time on roll and for some long periods of being disengaged before joining the school.
 - Most full-time and young adult ākonga who participated in NCEA assessments achieved success. This level of success has been generally sustained in recent years, within an environment of overall school growth.
 - A high proportion of full time ākonga (those who are not linked to a local school) enrol with low or no prior NCEA credits and spend less than two years on the roll. This is straining Te Kura's capacity to further support increased achievement for its learners.
 - The percentage attaining literacy and numeracy requirements at NCEA has shown a decline. This is now an area of focus for improvement for Te Kura.
15. When comparing aspects of NCEA for Te Kura within an environment of overall school roll growth, the following can be noted:
- An increasing number of ākonga are enrolled in NCEA.
 - In the last two years Te Kura has offered more standards across more subject areas.
 - A greater number of standards and credits are being awarded.
 - An increase in roll based NCEA achievement at all levels for full time Māori ākonga.
 - Between 2019 and 2020, small and modest improvements are observed for roll based NCEA achievement of all full time ākonga, including Māori.
 - The proportion of ākonga leaving the school having attained at least NCEA Level 2 is declining over time, and this is particularly apparent for Māori.
 - A greater proportion of Pacific ākonga are leaving Te Kura with NCEA Levels 1 to 3.
 - Rates of transition to further tertiary education and training within two years of leaving school are declining, particularly for Māori. Although of those who left in 2015, three quarters of school leavers had transitioned to a post-school education pathway within five years (i.e. by 2020).

Strengths of Te Kura

16. Te Kura is aware of and responsive to shifts in demand and changing diversity, technology, and stakeholders.
17. It is improvement focused and purposeful in using evaluation to inform its strategic shifts.
18. It has established sound digital infrastructure and systems. Its on-line curriculum supports modularised delivery, tailored to meet individual ākonga needs.

19. Supporting student wellbeing and lifting engagement in learning is an organisation-wide priority, resulting in evidence of positive trends in relation to improving engagement rates.

Challenges

20. Te Kura faces considerable constraints in the level of targeted additional support it can access and provide for its ākonga, many of whom have high level and unmet needs (social, education and well-being).
21. Entitlements to learning support and access to specialist support are not available elsewhere in the system, leading to some of our most at-risk ākonga being disadvantaged.
22. There is increasing reliance by the Ministry on Te Kura enrolling disengaged/alienated and at risk ākonga who have not been able to be successfully placed with a local school. Enrolments of these learners in Te Kura has increased by a magnitude of over 200% in the last three years. Many of these school-aged young people have not been engaged in learning for a substantial period prior to being referred to Te Kura. While ERO notes that Te Kura is working hard to support these learners, the evidence would suggest that locational based, intensive wrap around options, potentially supported by Te Kura are needed for these learners. This is a system wide issue and ERO believes requires urgent attention.

Opportunities

23. The opportunities for Te Kura to play a stronger role in the education system.
 - Earlier and faster re-engagement of at-risk ākonga into Te Kura to improve their engagement rates, progress and learning outcomes. Strengthening the role of the Ministry in the partnership between them, Te Kura, a wider range of schools should increase support for re-engagement and help prevent further disengagement from face-to-face schools.
 - The school may be the last school education pathway for many at risk ākonga. It is focusing on providing more to support the growing group of Māori ākonga. With targeted resources, a personalised approach and wrap around support Te Kura would be better placed to lift these young adults' success.
 - Te Kura has a role in supporting the resilience of the education system. It responded quickly to Ministry requests and system needs and offered a range of ways to support ākonga through COVID challenges. The system has an opportunity to learn how to sustain and build on these for future needs.
 - Te Kura has the potential to provide the resource of quality assured, curriculum aligned educational content for the sector more broadly.
 - Digital infrastructure and remote learning best practice pedagogy could be made available across multiple platforms, for wider use and benefit in the changing system needs of the current educational climate.

Conclusions

24. The report outlines its conclusions as follows:

- Te Kura's roll and role in New Zealand's education system is changing significantly and it has strengthened its learning support systems and capacity.
- Raising full-time student qualification acquisition is a persistent challenge, as is the growing number of students requiring additional learning support.
- Current policy and system settings are neither sufficient nor sustainable for Te Kura to effectively meet the needs of its diverse roll.
- Ministry referral practices should better optimise students' chances to reengage successfully in education. Referrals to Te Kura should be in the best interests of ākonga and ensure that they receive the support they need.
- Greater clarity and direction are needed from the Ministry on how it sees the long-term role of Te Kura evolving. The breadth and depth of its role may not be sufficiently visible and understood by the education sector.
- Meeting the needs of disengaged/alienated ākonga and promoting reengagement of learners is a whole-of-system responsibility and will require a complex set of policy and practice responses.

Recommendations for Te Kura

25. To bring about the necessary improvements to promote equity and excellence for ākonga 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 ākonga 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.
 - Liaise with the Ministry 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 ākonga, 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.

- Formalizing protocols for the management of referrals of ākonga to Te Kura.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education

26. To bring about the necessary improvements to promote equity and excellence for ākonga at Te Kura, and to fully use the potential of Te Kura's resources and expertise within the education system, ERO recommends that the Ministry:
- Review Te Kura's resources and supports available as a matter of ongoing priority. 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 ākonga.
 - Assess how access to learning support, particularly for those ākonga with high and moderate needs, can be improved. In doing this, consider how levels of learning support for ākonga at Te Kura can be aligned equitably to those available to ākonga with similar needs enrolled in face-to-face schools.
 - Formalise and strengthen relationships with Te Kura within the Ministry response and delivery systems to optimise enrolment referrals and improve consistency of practice across Ministry regions.
 - Consider how Te Kura can be used to play a greater role in the education system. This includes how Te Kura can support face-to-face schools in the retention of ākonga at risk of disengagement; the support that Te Kura can provide to the rest of the system in times of crises and emergencies when place based schooling is not possible, and leveraging its experience in curriculum and digital education more broadly.
 - 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.
27. ERO has met with Te Kura senior leaders, Trustees and Ministry leaders to discuss the findings, next steps for improvement and the report recommendations.
28. ERO intends to publish the confirmed review report on its website by the end of November 2021.

Recommendations

29. It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** the attached ERO report.
- b) **Note** that ERO intends to publish this report in the week beginning the 22nd of November 2021.

Noted

Noted

- c) **Note** through the course of this review ERO has identified several system wide issues that it has signalled as requiring urgent policy and practice attention – most notably the rapid expansion in the referral of Disengaged and alienated learners to Te Kura. **Noted**
- d) **Agree** to forward a copy of this report to Minister Hipkins, Associate Minister Davis and Associate Minister Sio. **Agree** ~~Disagree~~
- e) **Note** that this briefing is recommended for proactive release following the publication of the report. **Noted**



Nicholas Pole
Chief Executive

NOTED/APPROVED



Hon Jan Tinetti
Associate Minister of Education

2 / 11 / 2021