

**Ruakaka School**  
**Ruakaka, Northland**

**Education Review Office**

**External Evaluation**

# ERO External Evaluation

## Ruakaka School

### 1 Context

Ruakaka School is located within the Bream Bay area, Northland. The school caters for students from Years 1 to 6, and is currently experiencing roll growth. It is becoming more culturally diverse, with growing numbers of Māori students and a small number of students from Pacific, Asian and European nations. Some of these students receive support to learn English as part of their learning. The school caters for increasing numbers of children with special education needs both within mainstream classrooms, and in The Sanctuary, a high sensory learning space dedicated to this group of learners.

The school sits on the boundary of four iwi: Ngā Puhī, Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Whatua and Patuharakeke. It has strong connections with the local Takahiwai Marae and follows Ngāti Wai kawa. Working closely with Ngāti Wai, the school has opened two bilingual classes since the 2013 ERO review. One class caters for older students in Years 4, 5 and 6 and the other class is for students in Years 2 and 3.

The principal is experienced and has led the school for more than 10 years. She is supported by a good mix of long-serving and newer staff, including teachers and teacher aides. The board of trustees is supportive of the school and includes trustees who whakapapa to Takahiwai Marae.

### 2 Equity and excellence

The vision and valued outcomes for all learners in this school community are reflected in its mission statement of *permission to shine* and in its vision of providing children with a learning environment that promotes innovation and creativity, where everyone pursues excellence, and becomes their own navigator in all areas.

The school's whakatauki, *Ka aroha tātou ki te ako tahi: we love to learn together*, further exemplifies the values and principles the school seeks to promote.

The school's achievement information shows that many children achieve at and above the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Children who remain at Ruakaka School from Years 1 to 6 make good progress and achieve very well in relation to the National Standards.

The school's data also shows small but continuing declines in its overall levels of achievement in National Standards for reading, writing and mathematics between 2012 to 2015. The school's roll growth is reflected in this school-wide data. School leaders and teachers continue their work to accelerate the progress and achievement of all students, with emphasis on some Māori learners and boys in particular, to help address disparities in educational outcomes for some learners. These students include a number who have enrolled in recent years. Improving achievement in writing is a key focus, especially for Year 5 boys.

Since the 2013 ERO report teachers have participated in school wide professional learning to further improve their skills in accelerating student learning in mathematics and in literacy. Teachers and school leaders attribute the success of their efforts in improving and accelerating student achievement in writing and mathematics to this professional learning.

Teachers have also participated in externally facilitated professional learning in science, and teacher aides have led the use of computer-based literacy learning programmes throughout the school.

### **3 Accelerating achievement**

#### **How effectively does this school respond to Māori children whose learning and achievement need acceleration?**

The school responds very effectively to Māori children whose learning and achievement need acceleration. School leaders and staff are highly responsive to the increasing number of Māori students who arrive at various times during the year from different schools. Many of these students have experienced a number of school changes and have gaps in their learning. There is a strong sense of urgency in this area, with leaders and teachers working to ensure that student achievement information is increasingly accurate and valid.

This information is very well used to identify students' learning needs, and to design meaningful and individualised programmes aimed at accelerating progress and achievement. School leaders and teachers regularly evaluate the impact of specific and targeted learning programmes on the progress students make.

The school is highly responsive to whānau. The school's whānau liaison staff member, appointed in 2016 specifically to engage Māori parents and whānau, is having a positive impact in forging relationships with parents and caregivers and in providing support for children's learning and wellbeing. In 2015 the school received positive feedback from the Ministry of Education about its te reo Māori programmes.

The two bilingual class teachers lead the learning of te reo and tikanga, and ensure that school kawa is followed. More than half the school is involved in kapa haka, and students ably lead pōwhiri. The school day begins for all students and staff with complex karakia and himene. A teacher of te reo Māori, strategically appointed by the school for some years, also works to ensure that all students and staff outside of the bilingual classes learn very good quality te reo and tikanga. In 2015 the school received positive feedback from the Ministry of Education about its te reo Māori programmes.

These significant features of the school create a welcoming and positive environment for Māori students and their whānau, strengthening their sense of wellbeing and belonging, and promoting pride in their language, culture and identity.

#### **How effectively does this school respond to other children whose learning and achievement need acceleration?**

The school responds very effectively to other children whose learning and achievement need acceleration, including students with special educational needs and an increasing number of children from other nations with English language learning needs.

School leaders promote the same sense of urgency about accelerating the learning and achievement of these learners as they do with Māori students. They use data effectively and seek to ensure that programmes and interventions are purposeful and have a significant impact on learning.

Leaders and teachers work closely with the parents of children with special educational needs and value their specialist expertise. Teachers also access specific professional learning when required to further support students' particular learning requirements.

The school's English language learning programmes support students very well to speak and learn in a new and/or different language. Teachers focus on the strengths students bring to their learning, including promoting the use of their home or first languages to support new language development.

#### **4 School conditions**

##### **How effectively do the school's curriculum and other organisational processes and practices develop and enact the school's vision, values, goals and priorities for equity and excellence?**

The school promotes a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for children and their whānau. The principal and trustees work in partnership with whānau Māori and staff to enhance Māori student success, and to promote bicultural and bilingual learning opportunities for all children. Children take advantage of the various co-curricular opportunities available in sports, culture and the Arts, and in leadership. The school's values-focused curriculum helps children to be confident, self-managing learners.

The school's vision is strongly evident in the school's approach to curriculum design. Children and staff are encouraged to be innovative and take on challenges in their learning. In line with the school's whakatauki, teachers and school leaders work collaboratively to plan learning programmes that promote children's confidence, and that focus on their strengths, talents, interests and needs.

The curriculum provides children with very good opportunities to learn about and within their local area, and to experience innovation and real world problem solving. They especially enjoy increasingly rich learning in science. Teachers and teacher aides adapt learning programmes to the interests, strengths and needs of individual children.

Teachers' enthusiasm and energy engages and motivates children. They respond well to the high expectations teachers and staff have for their learning and behaviour. Older children especially have a very good understanding of their own learning and achievement, setting and evaluating their learning goals and next steps.

In line with the school's green-gold environmental status, the school's garden-to-table programme engages the whole school community and enhances children's learning and wellbeing. Children also benefit from significant physical activity, including safe cycling and swimming.

In partnership with senior leaders, staff and community, the principal provides effective professional leadership. She makes strategic staff appointments, and promotes good opportunities for teachers and staff to lead programmes and initiatives. She networks with other schools, leads school principal associations and accesses funding to support the vision for a constantly improving school. School leaders and teachers are solution-focused. They are reflective, and are constantly looking for ways to improve their practice and promote children's learning. Staff morale and parent engagement in the school is high.

The board of trustees are highly supportive of the school. They have a good understanding of their governance roles and responsibilities, and they receive good information about how well the school is managed. They connect well with the community and are currently planning for succession.

## 5 Going forward

### How well placed is the school to achieve and sustain equitable and excellent outcomes for all children?

The school is well placed to achieve and sustain equitable and excellent outcomes for all children.

Leaders and teachers:

- know the children who need their learning and achievement need to be accelerated
- respond effectively to the strengths, needs and interests of each child
- regularly evaluate how well teaching is working for these children
- act on what they know works well for each child
- build teacher capability effectively to achieve equitable outcomes for all children
- are well placed to achieve and sustain equitable and excellent outcomes for all children.

Trustees, school leaders and ERO agree that useful next steps for the school include:

- strengthening the use of Te Marautanga and Nga Whanakitanga in designing the bilingual curriculum, and assessing and reporting student learning in panui, pangarau and tuhituhi
- enhancing the use of te reo Māori throughout the mainstream curriculum, including connecting te reo Māori to the language of science, mathematics and other authentic curriculum concepts.

Trustees agree that they would benefit from professional learning in *Hautu*, the self-review tool designed by New Zealand School Trustees' Association (NZSTA) to build culturally responsive understandings among school boards. The board also recognises the importance of reviewing policies against practice, and in line with legislative changes.

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in three years.

## 6 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 the following:

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

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

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)
- physical safety of students
- teacher registration
- processes for appointing staff
- stand down, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions

- attendance
- compliance with the provisions of the *Vulnerable Children Act 2014*.

## **7 Recommendations**

ERO recommends that the school continue to progress its well considered processes and practices for reducing disparity and promoting equity and excellence in outcomes for all children.



Graham Randell  
Deputy Chief Review Officer Northern

21 June 2016

## About the school

Location	Ruakaka, Northland	
Ministry of Education profile number	1094	
School type	Contributing (Years 1 to 6)	
School roll	191	
Gender composition	Boys 52%	Girls 48%
Ethnic composition	Māori Pākehā other	52% 39% 9%
Review team on site	March 2016	
Date of this report	21 June 2016	
Most recent ERO report(s)	Education Review Education Review Education Review	June 2013 August 2010 December 2007