Our Kind of School

Student, whānau, staff, and school community views on what makes positive, inclusive, safe school environments where bullying is prevented and responded to.

November 2021

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About us

This report was a collaboration between the Office of the Children's Commissioner and The Ministry of Education, supported by the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group.

We identified that a greater understanding was required of how schools go about creating environments that prevent and address bullying for students. We were interested in the things that support schools to do this, as well as the things that get in the way. Our team designed an engagement approach to hear from students, school professionals, whānau and the wider school community to build this understanding.

Children and young people's rights in education are articulated in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Children's Convention and the Education and Training Act 2020. The Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Ministry of Education share the aim of ensuring children and young people have their rights upheld and their views on matters that affect them heard.

The "Our Kind of School" project team was made up of staff from the Office of the Children's Commissioner's Mai World team and the Ministry of Education. We came together to hear the views of students and share those views to bring about positive change in education across New Zealand.

Acknowledgements

A number of people and organisations contributed to making this report possible. These include the four primary schools and one kura kaupapa Māori who welcomed us into their environment and their wider communities. We also thank the Bullying Prevention Advisory Group for its input. Most of all we are grateful to the students who participated in the project for their time, wisdom and insights.

Ngā mihi nui and thank you to everyone who was involved.

We undertook this project to increase our understanding of how to reduce bullying in schools. Using the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy outcomes framework[1] as a foundation, we sought to build a picture of what schools and kura kaupapa Māori can do so that students feel 'accepted, respected and connected' and 'involved and empowered' in their schools or kura.[2]

We have heard from children and young people in previous engagements that they need to have their wellbeing needs met before they are ready to learn.[3] This is reflected in the Education and Training Act 2020 which sets out:

» that a key purpose of the Act is to establish and regulate an education system that supports the health, safety and well-being of students (S4(b)).

» that Boards must ensure schools are physically and emotionally safe for staff and students, and must take all reasonable steps to eliminate racism, bullying and any other form of discrimination within the school (S127(1)(b)).

Similarly, the first priority of the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities set out by the Government in 2020 seeks to "ensure places of learning are safe, inclusive and free from racism, discrimination and bullying".

These statements articulate the environment and conditions we expect for students in education. The realisation of these expectations remains a challenge, particularly with respect to bullying.

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[1] The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, launched in 2019, sets out a shared understanding of and youth wellbeing, Government actions, and indicators: https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy.

[2] In this report kura refers to kura kaupapa Māori.

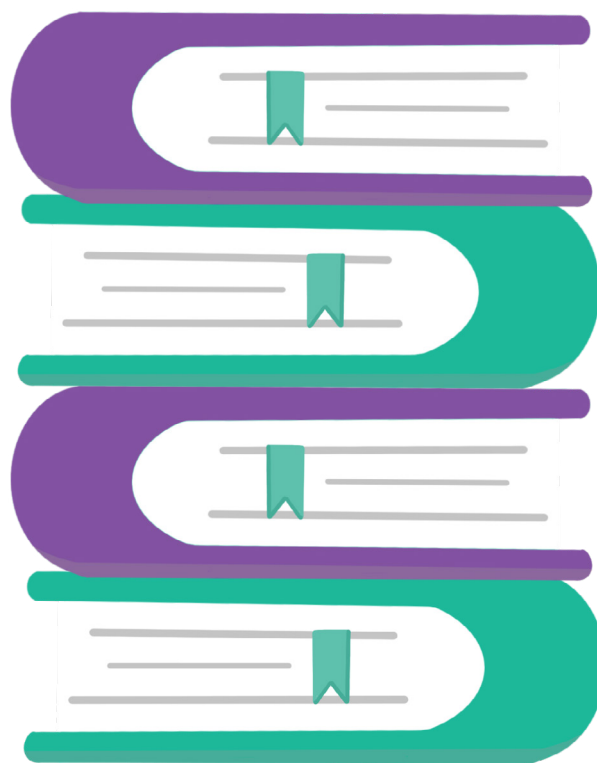[3] For example: Education Matters to Me (2018) https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights/.

We started this work from a solid foundation

Bullying is a significant and ongoing issue for schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. Reports such as *Education Matters to Me*, by the Office of the Children's Commissioner and New Zealand School Trustees Association,[4] and the Education Review Office's report *Bullying Prevention and Response in New Zealand Schools*,[5] as well as data from the New Zealand Council for Educational Research's *Wellbeing@School* surveys,[6] all speak to the prevalence and nature of bullying in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. The Ministry of Education has undertaken a review of the evidence in these reports. It has also considered previous engagements with school communities including *Kōrero Mātauranga* (the Ministry's "Education Conversation" which fed into the Tomorrow's Schools Review).[7] The Ministry of Education also facilitates the cross-sector Bullying Prevention Advisory Group (BPAG) focused on providing joined-up leadership on bullying prevention and response. In collaboration with the BPAG the Ministry provides the Bullying-Free NZ website. The site provides resources based on the Bullying-Free NZ School Framework[8] and other information aimed at supporting schools to implement evidence-based approaches to bullying. This framework identifies nine key elements underpinning effective whole-school approaches to building a safe and positive climate and culture.

It is clear from all these activities that good practice in regard to preventing and responding to bullying includes a multi-faceted environmental focus that involves the whole school community.

The purpose of this project was to collect examples of good practice and identify the barriers and enablers schools face when seeking to create safe and inclusive environments. This collection of tangible examples can provide other schools and kura kaupapa Māori with ideas and inspiration for their own communities.

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[4] See: https://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights/.

[5] See: https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/bullying-prevention-and-response-in-new-zealand-schools-may-2019.

[6] See: https://wellbeingatschool.org.nz/ws-surveystools.

[7] See: https://conversation.education.govt.nz/about.

[8] See: https://bullyingfree.nz/preventing-bullying/the-nine-elements-of-an-effective-whole-school-approach-to-preventing-and-responding-to-bullying/.

We sought to learn from schools and kura doing well

We went to four primary schools and one kura kaupapa Māori that had demonstrated effective practice in supporting student wellbeing.[9] We sought the views of students, whānau, staff members, and the wider school/kura community about what was working well and why.

This report shares our findings. We begin with overall insights common across all five schools/kura. This is followed by individual summaries from each of the five different schools and kura, including examples they shared. A short description of the engagement methodology we used is included as an appendix to this report, as is a glossary of key kupu Māori used in this report.

The names of the schools/kura or individuals we engaged with are not identified. The agreement of anonymity allowed students, whānau and staff to share their views openly.

We do not expect this report to provide a recipe to follow. Every one of the 2,500+ schools in Aotearoa New Zealand are unique. Our hope is that other schools and kura find the insights in this report useful and can use them to grow a culture of continuous learning in our school system so that every student in Aotearoa New Zealand feels accepted, respected, and connected inside the school gates and beyond.

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[9] Criteria for wellbeing was based on trends in NZCER Wellbeing@School data. https://wellbeingatschool.org.nz/about.
This is further discussed in the methodology section in Appendix 1.

We engaged with four primary schools and one kura kaupapa Māori

In late 2020, we visited four schools. They were a mix of full primary and contributing primary schools and one kura kaupapa Māori. Due to the timing in Term 4, we did not seek to involve secondary schools or wharekura.

The schools were geographically spread. They covered a range of urban and rural settings, and deciles. School/kura rolls ranged from 50 students to 400+. Student populations were diverse, including schools with a majority Māori student population, with Pacific students, students from a range of other ethnic groups, and students with disabilities and/or learning support needs.

We engaged with more than 350 participants across the five schools/kura combined, including:

» 250+ students, predominantly in years 5-8 (but some younger)

» Approximately 70 staff members, including school/kura leaders, teachers, teacher aides and administrators. We also interviewed some external support staff, including Social Workers in Schools (SWiS), Learning Support Coordinators (LSC), Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), and Resource Teachers Māori (RTM)

» 45+ whānau and community members who volunteered at, or provided a service through, their school/kura, including board members at each school/kura. Parents of students with disabilities and/or learning support needs were interviewed at four of the schools/kura.

Fundamental to the design of this project was our "co-decide" approach. All engagements were designed with input from each school/kura. This meant schools/kura could decide what approach best suited their ākonga, whānau and kaimahi. A mixed-method approach included face-to-face interviews and focus groups, where facilitators asked open ended questions that were part of a pre-planned question matrix.

We asked the principals to support us to engage with a diverse range of participants, taking care to include Māori, Pacific, rainbow, and disabled students and adults. To enable us to do this well, we intentionally put together a project team with specific expertise, including te reo Māori speakers and those with experience in disability and rainbow communities. Information about the project was distributed to whānau and community by the schools/kura, and whānau and community members were able to choose how to participate.

Observing and honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi was vital for the wellbeing of all participants in the engagements, and especially to hear and understand the voices of mokopuna Māori and their whānau. A Kaitakawaenga Kaupapa Māori role was established to ensure tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori guided the project team and the engagement approach. A karakia reflecting the intent of the project partners as well as the aspirations for ākonga was written for this work.

Of the five schools/kura, three provided options for learning in reo rua and/or rumaki classes, and one was a kura kaupapa Māori where only te reo Māori was spoken. We engaged with participants in te reo Māori across three of the schools/kura. In schools with bilingual or rumaki units we engaged with the kaiako of those units.

More information on our selection, engagement and ethics processes can be found in the methodology section in Appendix 1.

There is much to learn from the experiences of these schools and kura

Students have valuable insights into what safe, positive, inclusive environments look like

» Understanding individual and diverse student experiences required hearing students' views and valuing their lived experience.

» Listening to students' views and actioning their ideas at school/kura helped create a culture of respect between staff and students. Students at all schools and kura regardless of age, should have this opportunity.

» Listening to students' views regularly and meaningfully led to safer, more positive, and more inclusive school/kura environments.

Strong school/kura leadership is critical to creating safe, positive and inclusive environments

» Strong leadership had a domino effect on school/kura culture.

» A continuous improvement approach that is open to feedback from students, staff and whānau helped create safe, positive and inclusive school/kura environments.

Getting to know and involving students and their whānau builds strong relationships across the school/ kura community

» The schools and kura supported students as part of their broader whānau, friendship and peer groups.

» Students, staff and whānau held strong relationships with one another, which built positive, safe inclusive school/ kura environments, shaped by the entire school/kura community.

» Whānau were interested and keen to be involved in their child's school/kura journeys and had valuable contributions to make.

» Building relationships with whānau helped to prevent and resolve issues as they occurred.

» There are lots of different ways to involve and communicate with whānau.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to bullying prevention and response

» Positive, inclusive, safe environments built on strong relationships were effective at preventing bullying.

» Schools and kura prevented bullying in school/kura without using specific bullying prevention programmes.

» Tikanga Māori provided a strong foundation for building a safe, positive and inclusive school/kura culture and a framework for effectively preventing and responding to bullying.

It's not only about resources – but they certainly help

» Some of the school/kura created safe, positive and inclusive environments in spite of limited resources. However, this often relied on the school/kura leadership going above and beyond their mandate and sometimes providing resources out of their own pocket.

» Having significant resources meant the school/kura was able to provide holistic layers of support more easily. Rural schools and kura did not have the same access to community resources and external services and acted as a frontline service for children's wellbeing beyond education.

Six key insights

We found six key insights

The five schools and kura are doing many positive things to prevent and respond to bullying. These include both the proactive creation of safe and inclusive school/kura environments and specific responses to bullying. The two go hand in hand.

Reflecting on these initiatives we were able to identify barriers that can get in the way of, and enablers that can support, schools and kura to create environments that prevent and respond to bullying.

Each school and kura did this in ways that worked for their students, their whānau, and wider school community.

We found six key commonalities across the five schools and kura:

1. Knowing, and meeting the needs of, each student.

2. Strong and respectful school/kura leadership, which lays the foundation for a positive school/kura culture.

3. Commitment to tikanga and te reo Māori in the classroom, culture, and community of the school/kura.

4. Connecting with and including whānau and wider community in school/kura life.

5. Valuing and celebrating staff and student diversity.

6. Quick and effective responses to bullying incidents.

1. Knowing, and meeting the needs of each student

Schools and kura recognised that students have diverse needs and demonstrated a willingness to accommodate these needs. There was an acceptance that the way staff teach must work for all students. A staff member at one school/kura told us:

> "Me aukati ki te kore taea te akomanga katoa ki te ako."
>
> (We will not go ahead [with teaching] if the whole class can't learn or participate)

Students across all five schools and kura talked about how their teachers meet their individual learning needs, or noticed their teachers doing that for others.

> "Teachers help us learn and look after each other. We are all like a big family."

There was a high level of awareness among students of the needs of their peers and how they could play a role in supporting each other. For example, students understood they have different learning preferences and strengths. They accommodated this by working together, giving each other quiet space, being comfortable seeing each other move around when they needed to, and offering support to one another in the classroom without judgement.

Having sufficient resources helped enable the schools and kura to meet their students' needs. One school/kura had significant resources and additional teaching staff with specific expertise which allowed for more one-on-one time with students. They could also design individualised learning plans to support students' learning.

The principal noted this level of support freed him up to do other things:

> "If we didn't have a SENCO [Special Education Needs Coordinator], I [the principal] would be doing it. The SENCO does a range of things including organising teacher aides, planning interventions, doing referrals, in-class support referrals, RTLB [Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour] referrals, liaising with classroom teachers, ORS applications – which takes time - but is invaluable. She spends a lot of time on pastoral care."

Some schools and kura talked about how additional funding for resources would enable them to better meet the needs of their students. This could include new infrastructure, additional teaching staff, and specialist support. Students at some schools and kura talked about how they wish their school/kura had more resources. When asked what gets in the way of school being a good place to be, student told us:

> "There's no money-we need to pay the bills of the whole school so we can do more things."

We often heard about how teaching staff and school/kura community go above and beyond to find ways to meet the needs of all students. A parent at one school/kura told us:

> "There is no embarrassment for parents if they don't have food. If one kid doesn't have a lunch the whole school gets a lunch so that one kid won't get singled out."

This demonstrates the intentional community and holistic approach of the school/kura, while addressing the individual needs of their students.

Schools and kura also had a range of different approaches to support student autonomy and agency. These included leadership opportunities, self-directed learning, and supporting tuākana-tēina relationships between junior and senior students. Students valued the opportunity to choose what and how they learn, and to contribute to the running of their school/kura.

> "Instead of, like, the teachers controlling it you can suggest ideas to the teachers."

> "Seniors are given responsibilities and get to have a say in some of the things that happen at school."

> "They ask us in our classroom, and we can give our ideas."

Similarly, whānau saw these approaches as a positive way for students to take ownership of their learning, explore their interests, and gain valuable leadership skills. One parent told us:

> "My experience (I'm 33 now) in education felt like I had to follow the system, it was just a process to go through to get to uni or earning potential. What they've done now the kaiako are all about boosting them up in the classroom; they invite them to share that type of thing. For me it was 'shut up and pay attention'. Now the way the class is moving, they adjust the room, have individual set ups, lets the kids find their own space. They are open to kids expressing themselves how they like. I'm impressed with that."

2. Strong and respectful school/kura leadership, which lays the foundation for a positive school/kura culture

The leadership of all schools and kura played an important part in determining the school/kura culture. The leadership teams at all the schools seemed to take a continuous improvement and inquiry process approach to change. They sought feedback from their students, whānau and staff and were open to trying new things. This approach appeared to have a domino effect on the general staff culture. Many of the staff interviewed talked about a reciprocal relationship of respect with their leadership teams. This helped set expectations for how both staff and students should work together.

A staff member at one school/kura put it this way:

> "If you can create a safe place for the teachers, as they learn, they have to feel safe, confident, that they're not bullied; everything's trickle down … If you're not providing a safe, confident, comfortable area for your teachers, children are never going to feel loved, because they can see you're not expressing love to your colleagues … Our group of teachers plan together, talk together often; meet out on the deck a lot; kids always see them out there together — visibly together out there and quite close. We do have expectations as to what children should or shouldn't do and how they should act; respect in all its forms; aligned with values."

The principals of all the schools and kura were described by both the other staff and whānau as extraordinary leaders who go above and beyond their role to support their staff, students, and whānau. School/kura leaders were well-known, trusted and approachable, and prioritised building relationships with the school/kura

community. At one school/kura, the principal and deputy principal achieve this by standing at the two school/kura gates to greet families and students every day.

For some of the schools and kura, the leadership had changed recently. Staff and whānau described how the new leaders had taken on the challenge of changing the culture and building the trust of their school/kura community. The way principals worked to gain trust varied across different communities.

Staff and whānau also talked about how principals use their strong relationships with the community to benefit the school/kura:

> "[Principal] keeps the environment stimulating and is proactive about what is available to the school. He will go out into the community to find opportunities that will support the growth of the school including PD [training] for the teachers; programmes for students; lunches etc."
>
> "Current tumuaki is from the area and has strong connections. Always advertising the school socially and shares her pride for the school and community. Continues to have an interest in students that have left the school, and follows their achievements etc which forms lifelong relationships.

How supportive they are of their staff:

> "Current tumuaki has always been incredibly supportive and incredibly approachable."
>
> [Principal] is also very considerate of his staff's needs. He will never overload the staff with work but offer support."

How their principal's trust in their staff to do whatever is needed to support their students makes a positive difference:

> "Great management at the top – principal and deputy principal. They're really good support and open to anything. So definitely them. I just think that they're leading from the top, and if it's done right from there then everything else... I mean it's only just got better since the time that I got here. I like that there's not so many restrictions on myself. If I thought it was gonna work for my kids, then I'd do it, and I would be allowed to do it. Management and having faith in the staff, that we know we're doing what we need to do for our kids."
>
> "[Principal] has always been receptive to anything that will widen the kids' world, add to their kete. Wonderful ambassador for the school."

And how, ultimately, they make their schools and kura safe and positive places to be:

> "Koira ngā momo rangatira pai ki au, kia aukati te raruraru, kia haumaru te kura katoa, ko ia tērā."
>
> (These are the traits of a leader, to resolve the issues, to keep the whole kura safe, he is that).

Staff across the schools and kura recognised that for students to respect them, they first needed to respect students and be accountable to the same student behaviour expectations. There was a strong sense that they have a responsibility to demonstrate positive behaviour for students to see and learn from; to "Be the person you want them to be" as one staff member said.

Some students told us about how they could see their teachers practicing the values of their school/kura with each other, which encouraged them to do the same. We heard about this in action in one school/kura when a number of separate interviews (with both staff and students) made reference to how students felt comfortable telling their teachers if they did not feel the teachers were acting in line with the school/kura values.

3. Commitment to tikanga and te reo Māori in the classroom, culture and community of the school/kura

We heard a range of perspectives at each school/kura about the presence of tikanga Māori, use of te reo, and how embedded te ao Māori worldviews were in the school/kura culture. While there were differences across the schools and kura, all had structured frameworks and practices that incorporated tikanga and te reo in different ways into: the classroom, how they worked with whānau.

In some schools and kura, we observed tikanga Māori being interwoven through the fabric of the school/kura. This included tikanga influencing the school/kura values, how staff taught, and the way schools and kura addressed conflict, including incidents of bullying. For example, in one school/kura, many students spoke to us about an old kauri tree that they recognised as a safe place to calm down after something had happened. A student told us:

> "Ko Koro Kauri tētahi wāhi tino pai hei whakatau i taku wairua." "Ko tērā taku raukura mauri." "Ko te whakapapa o Koro Kauri, ko te manaaki i ngā rākau katoa."
>
> (Koro Kauri is a good place for me to settle my spirit. It is my peaceful life force. The history of Koro Kauri is to protect all the trees)

Students and adults in another school/kura explained that the school/kura has integrated karakia, whakataukī and pūrākau, wairuatanga and the history of local iwi and tīpuna into their teaching. Students told us about how stories about the whenua and their whakapapa foster a strong connection and belonging. They also talked about how they support each other through haka, karakia and waiata, which were a source of pride.

> "Every day we do karakia and waiata and kapa haka and we learn stories. We learn about supporting each other."

There was a sense from staff and whānau that instilling tikanga in this way laid a strong foundation for students and staff to be able to relate well to one another. It also reinforced cultural pride and self-worth in mokopuna and whānau Māori. It enabled issues to be addressed quickly, and appropriate support to be provided to students and whānau when needed, because students, staff and whānau all knew there were processes already set in place.

For some schools and kura, we heard incorporating tikanga Māori was a newer consideration across the whole school/kura and was stronger in the bilingual or rumaki units. For others, the presence of tikanga Māori depended on the teacher in each classroom and was not uniform across the school/kura.

All schools and kura had a desire to continue to grow their tikanga and te reo Māori capacity and capability.

4. Connecting with and including whānau and wider community in school/kura life

Each school/kura had a strong focus on including whānau and supporting them to participate in school/kura life. In some schools/kura, whānau worked closely on key aspects of learning and decision-making processes, such as designing their school/kura curriculum and strategy. Relationships between the school/kura, whānau and wider community at some schools/kura were established through whakapapa connections, with whānau members also being part of the school staff. Others brought whānau in through organised events.

There was a strong sense that each school/kura is at the heart of its community, and this has been supported by principals who have built strong networks within their local communities. They, and school/kura staff generally, put a lot of effort into getting to know students and their whānau in their whole context, both in and out of school/kura. They told us about how they understand that building relationships in this way takes both time and intentional work. Those we engaged with told us that the focus on relationship-building made the schools/kura feel like a safe place for whānau. They were comfortable reaching out to the school/kura for support, and enthusiastic about being involved in school/kura life. A parent at one school put it like this:

> "…. Here you can rock up as a māmā and you can sit down and eat your lunch with them and you are not told to leave straight away, you can have a kōrero with whoever is here, there is an openness that is not experienced in the city schools, and respectful relationships."

This also helped students to feel safe. A student told us: *"I always feel connected when I am with my whānau. This kura is my whānau."*

We heard from whānau about the difference it makes when staff get to know them and communicate regularly about their child's school/kura journey. While this was a commonality across the schools/kura, the way staff achieved it varied significantly depending on the needs of their school/kura community. For example, some schools/kura communicated primarily through email or apps while others preferred communicating face-to-face. Broadly, whānau did not mind how communication happened providing it was consistent, accessible to them, and they knew they could reach out and get a response if they needed to.

The same trust that was demonstrated between staff and students was important between staff and whānau too. We heard that building this trust means that whānau feel involved and empowered in school/kura life. Even if they aren't in contact with their children's teachers in person, they have oversight of their children's learning. A parent at one school/kura told us:

> "Seesaw (an app) allows the teacher to be able to share what they do in the classroom with parents. When we see what they're doing – the kids probably forget sometimes, but seeing it is good…
>
> There is a direct channel to contact teachers. The teachers know me pretty well on private message, even though I work and don't do drop offs."

It also means whānau feel comfortable to ask for support when necessary without stigma, including for basics like food. A staff member at one school/kura said:

> "Parents now feel comfortable with emailing regularly asking for the school to feed kids – whereas previously would keep the child at home. Quite a large contingent now, become socially acceptable to ask. Relationship with the families and treating them with respect, responding positively when parents do ask, has enabled this to happen. Real culture of making people feel comfortable to ask for support – by being non-judgemental and treating people with respect."

5. Valuing and celebrating staff and student diversity

All the schools/kura valued and celebrated the diversity of staff and students in a range of ways; from designing a local curriculum to reflect mana whenua histories, displaying flags in the school/kura staff room, to holding events and performances. Celebrations often helped the school/kura link with families and whānau.

Students talked about opportunities to celebrate their culture making them feel accepted, respected and connected:

> "Kapa haka – learning about our stories and our culture" [makes students feel accepted, respected, and connected]
>
> "Pasifika roopu" [helps students make friends at school]
>
> "Including us and our culture" [makes students feel like they belong at school]

Many staff spoke about wanting students to be proud of who they are and the importance of valuing each other's diverse backgrounds, languages and cultures. The principal at one school/kura said:

> One of the most powerful things we talk about at [school] is "knowing the learner", so that involves language, culture and identity. And so when those children and families and whānau walk in the gate, they feel a connection and see something they connect to. For example, students should not have to take off their "Māori backpack" at the gate to succeed at [school].

They talked about how this knowledge included pronouncing students' names correctly. The principal of another school/kura told us:

> "We have very diverse communities, but our friends are just our friends. People are not treated differently, the expectation is that you are accepted rather than you are not. There are no groups or sense of 'I will only be around these people.' Everyone is encouraged to know everyone and see everyone as a friend."

Similarly, the principal of another school/kura, with a majority of Māori students with local iwi connections said:

> "To make the kids feel good – it's about supporting the kids with their identity. It's making them feel proud that they're actually who they are – they're the ahi kā around here. They have a really important role holding the knowledge of (place). They're worth something."

Staff told us that celebrating students' cultures created an environment that was free from bullying:

> "Kids are generally accepted and respected for who they are, especially in my class. I don't tolerate any bullying of race or culture, but I haven't had to deal with that which shows that the kids are accepting of each other. It's part of the community which is so diverse."

Schools/kura also took a strengths-based and inclusive approach to supporting students with disabilities and/or learning support needs. As with diverse ethnic backgrounds and cultures, differences related to disability and/or learning support needs were seen as something to be accepted and valued. As a staff member at one school/kura put it:

> "Children are really accepting of kids who need support. Kids don't mock them – they are part of the class, but they just accept it; kids just carry on with their work and let the teacher deal with it. Teachers also accept kids saying hello to the teacher aides when they come into the class. It's brilliant, really good."

Staff told us that the diversity in their classrooms helped students be empathetic and accepting. As a staff member at one school said:

> "I think a really big part of what makes the children the way they are [is that] they are all inherently kind and respectful and understanding. Students have been exposed to children with special needs. They develop empathy through interaction with a whole range of different children. Automatically makes them accepting. They're exposed to equity, rather than equality."

6. Quick and effective responses to bullying incidents

We did not hear about any specific bullying prevention programmes in our engagements. Rather, schools/kura had a range of approaches to prevent and respond to bullying. Responses focused on finding out the root cause of the behaviour and on restoring relationships between students.

Bullying was talked about as an uncommon occurrence at all the schools/kura we visited. When bullying did happen, we heard that incidents were generally followed up quickly and effectively. This was made possible because of the strong relationships and understanding staff already had with students and their whānau.

A staff member at one school/kura put it this way:

> "If you model, then children know. I think that's happening all over and people are doing well at making relationships throughout the school and that's knowing who your kids are and who their families are. You...need to find out why children are lashing out, something going on and we need to work it out. So, you still have to say 'hey stop, that's not acceptable. We need to talk' but the next part as a teacher is to find out why that's happening."

How schools/kura responded to bullying incidents varied. Some school/kura had structured approaches to addressing bullying incidents, utilising the school/kura values framework for example, while others took a more organic approach. Across all schools/kura there was a recognition that students should be given the time and space to reflect and calm down, and to explain what had happened. Schools/kura often described to us that there was a reason for such behaviour and that staff have a

responsibility to find out. This again was possible because of the strong relationships students had with each other and school/kura staff.

Some students told us about how this approach worked from their perspective:

> "I te mahi hē koe, te mahi kino koe rānei, ka haere koe ki te tiki i tētahi Kaiako, a ka waiho ia i te tamaiti ki tētahi taha kia whakatau ia i tana wairua. A ka taea te hoki mai."
>
> (If you did something not so good, or that was wrong, someone would go get a teacher. The teacher would then separate that person from everyone to allow them to settle their wairua before they were allowed to rejoin the group).
>
> "When there is problems the teachers will talk to us, sometimes in a small group sometimes all together. They hear our side and the other person's side.
>
> We are reminded about our whakapapa and our potential – our roles in the school and why we should do better."

This approach also enabled students to feel safe to proactively approach staff about and openly discuss bullying incidents. A staff member at one school/kura explained:

> "A lot of kids come to you and talk about different things. It's nice to be in a school that's like that, with no bullying...Things come out and it gets addressed in the classroom. And they do feel that they can come to us and talk to us without being scared or anything like that."

Many students we spoke to have appreciated the support they received to deal with difficult situations, including bullying. When we asked one young person if their school/kura was good at helping them with bullies they responded:

> "Definitely ... When I was at my old school and I'd get hurt they'd say sort it out by yourself. At this school they actually help you."

Students in one focus group told us they feel that "mistakes are the best" because staff and their peers help them through it and to be better afterwards. They explained they have been encouraged to "stop, listen and then respond" to different situations.

Students across the schools/kura shared that people usually act in a way that harms others for a reason, because they are hurting or have unmet needs. The students demonstrated a high level of empathy in this regard. For example, students told us that people who bully others need support themselves.

> "I feel they bully because they got bullied once and they just want to bully back."
>
> "Adults should help students, talk to them daily about some things they might be having trouble with".

Individual school
and kura examples

Kura Tuatahi

Overarching Summary

Context

This kura kaupapa Māori is located in the eastern North Island with approximately 70 ākonga in years 1-8. The kura is strongly connected with the local iwi of the region.

Ways the school creates positive, inclusive, safe environments that help to prevent bullying

The kura strengthens connections to iwi and marae and promotes the sharing of knowledge between ākonga and kaumātua. Tikanga and kaupapa Māori are a normal part of kura life and underpin the activities and teaching at the kura. Tikanga is taught to ākonga, known by whānau, and talked about as a way of living that aligns with the kura values.

Time and effort are put into building strong relationships across the kura and into the community. The kura puts a strong emphasis on whanaungatanga, and whakapapa connections help to facilitate this. This also helps to prevent bullying. Tuākana-tēina relationships between students also helps build connections between year groups.

Kaiako model positive relationships to students. The tumuaki has built strong relationships with children and whānau, as well as the community and other groups that support the school. Whānau are invested in school events and are involved in decision-making, including through regular hui with staff where they can share ideas, and the kura has an 0800 number for whānau in need.

Kaiako adapt to suit each ākonga and whānau. In class they take a flexible approach to respond to the individual needs of ākonga; for example if they need a break or to step out of class, they support them to do so.

The kura uses whakairo and ngākau Māori to identify and respond to issues such as bullying. It also uses kāri wātea (calming cards) to allow time and space for children to calm down after something has happened. Ākonga told us they go to Koro Kauri, a tree that is seen as a safe and calming place, if they want to calm their spirit.

What it means to feel "accepted, respected and connected"

Whakapapa and whanaungatanga are vital for connection to whenua, whānau and tangata

Ākonga told us about how their favourite people made them feel happy and supported. Key characteristics and actions included giving them time, kindness, being loving, watching over them, being loyal and playing with them.

> "He nui te aroha mai ngā kaiako hei awhiawhi."
> (There is a lot of support and love shown from the teachers).

Whānau told us about how whakapapa and whanaungatanga facilitated strong connections within the kura and the wider community. They told us that one of the ways this is done is through the "*Tuākana-Tēina model - whānau dynamic. Intergenerational āhua helps facilitate connections.*"

Ākonga told us about how the tuākana-tēina model works inside the kura, in which they look after younger students by doing things like handing out food at lunchtime.

The ākonga told us that kapa haka, waiata and mau rākau were important to making them feel connected. They explained that kaupapa Māori is part of their day-to-day learning within the kura.

> "Ngā waiata me te kapa haka."
> ([We do] songs and Māori performing arts).

Having access to kai makes ākonga feel accepted, respected and connected

Ākonga spoke about how kai made them feel happy and cared for. Ākonga know that there is food available for them at kura and that the kura can provide kai to whānau after-hours if they need it:

> "He kai kei roto i te tari."
> (There is food in the office).

Ways students are made to feel accepted, respected and connected at this school

Whakapapa facilitates whanaungatanga between staff, ākonga and whānau. With this foundation strong relationships can be built and enjoyed.

Ākonga emphasised the value of receiving care and support from kaiako who have a te ao Māori view on wellbeing. They told us about their whakapapa connections to iwi in the area, which were important to them.

Whānau told us that whanaungatanga helps to prevent bullying of ākonga who are perceived as "different" such as those with disabilities and/or learning support needs. One parent told us that her disabled son has thrived at the kura, due to being so well supported:

"I have been to a mainstream and special needs school and now kura kaupapa and this is the most confident he has ever been. We had that risk of him struggling with communicating in English let alone the reo. We have brought him into an environment where he is loved. He is wrapped around by everybody. They all love him so that has helped him to strive. He's been able to pick up things better than other kura."

Whānau spoke about the strong whakapapa connections they had with each other. The kura uses stories of their tīpuna to help set expectations for behaviour.

One parent explained:

"[The kura] uses our tīpuna and our stories as reference for behaviour and allowing the tēina to be leaders and being consistent with what behaviour is okay and what is not okay. They get time to fix their mistakes if they need."

Tikanga and kaupapa Māori is woven into the fabric of the kura and underpins how issues are resolved

The kura is guided by tikanga Māori, which is entrenched into the fabric of the kura. Manaakitanga is evident across the whole kura community, with the kaiako and tumuaki working hard to improve wellbeing. The tumuaki talked about taking a "village" approach to supporting ākonga wellbeing:

"Now the saying goes it takes a village to raise a tamaiti so we take a similar approach. So we have kids that we know of that have certain things that tick their behaviours so as a collective we don't have a paper or a ture (rule) thing telling us me pēnei me pērā (such and such), we just doing what the ngākau Māori would do so if the tamaiti was hungry you whāngai that tamaiti. I don't care where that tamaiti came from I don't care what behaviour that tamaiti has; at the end of the day they must be fed - fed with kai, fed with knowledge. Both go two and two, nothing can't go without one another so just providing wellbeing. And our wellbeing kaupapa hasn't stopped."

Ākonga and kaiako incorporate tikanga into all parts of their day. Processes and expectations are clear for all. Whānau told us that tikanga is a way of living, rather than just rules, and that tikanga aligns with the kura values.

The tikanga around resolving issues is holistic rather than punitive. For example, staff understand there is a root cause to bullying behaviour, including the impacts of racism and colonisation, and focus on modelling and reinforcing positive behaviour.

One whānau member put it this way:

> "Some teachers are developing models of positive behaviour and are giving the tamariki nice things to say to one another as not all kids have positive reinforcements. There is a consistent focus on positives and positive behaviour. Some forms of punishment can reinforce bullying itself. They need to reprogram and give tamariki another option, take a holistic view … In its simplest form bullies are bullies because they have been bullied or it is learned behaviour. The impacts of colonisation and racism and then the further stress of corona and where that behaviour is normalised that added stress just perpetuates that behaviour. All whānau need to be involved and be aware of bullying within the school."

A staff member gave another example of how the tumuaki had addressed an incident by using it as a learning opportunity, rather than taking a punitive approach:

> "[He] shifted it to curriculum; let them go out there and do something around curriculum rather than punish them for going out and playing with the tires out there. Because they were very attracted to the pile of tires out there. And his response was to turn to the kaiako and rather making it a punishable matter, go and get them to write a poetry about the tires or something like that."

Ākonga talked about activities they enjoy doing at the kura, which are all underpinned by the school values and te ao Māori. They told us that kaupapa Māori is used at kura to teach them values, tikanga and to set behavioural expectations.

Ākonga were aware of tikanga around bullying. They told us that when something happens, they know to go and get a kaiako who will support the people involved to discuss what has happened and resolve the issue together. They gave examples of how behaviours that harm others are responded to at kura, such as having time at Koro Kauri (an old kauri tree in the school grounds) and having time to themselves to calm down and reflect.

The kura uses whakairo and ngākau Māori to identify and respond to issues. It also uses kāri wātea (calming cards) to allow time and space for ākonga to calm down. These are physical cards kaiako hand out to ākonga, either when an incident has happened or just when kaiako notice the behaviour of ākonga is escalating, to allow them to take some time to calm down outside. After a few minutes, kaiako ask how ākonga are feeling and when they are ready, encourage them to re-join the class. Whānau told us this process works well to address bullying as it de-escalates situations.

The kura has created safe spaces for ākonga and whānau

Ākonga commonly spoke to us about an old kauri tree which they felt was a safe place. They told us that the tikanga around the tree is to be calm.

"Ko Koro Kauri tētahi wāhi tino pai hei whakatau i taku wairua. Ko tērā taku raukura mauri." "Ko te whakapapa o Koro Kauri, ko te manaaki i ngā rākau katoa."

(Koro Kauri is a good place for me to settle my spirit. It is my peaceful life force. The history of Koro Kauri is to protect all the trees).

Koro kauri was spoken about by ākonga often: "One as safe place, two as a place to calm one's spirit before returning to play or to class."

Whānau told us that the kura is a safe space for ākonga and whānau, as the principal has been released from teaching to develop the tikanga of the kura and foster whanaungatanga within the kura community. This was done by making efforts to meet and talk with whānau, both individually and through kura-wide wānanga.

Kaiako create a positive environment and role model the kura values

Whānau spoke to us about how the kaiako model positive relationships and empower the ākonga. A whānau member told us:

"It starts from the āhua of the kaiako. The kaiako is responsible for facilitating that from the beginning."

Whānau told us that staff at the kura work well together and will help one another when needed.

Kaiako care deeply for ākonga which helps them feel accepted, respected and connected:

"Have experienced bullying in a previous kura, and since being at [kura] her son has said that he feels like he 'has been here forever māmā.'"

"At [kura] when there is a raru (conflict) they (Kaiako) are quick to resolve it and make a lesson of it so kids are learning."

"In fact, the main and most important thing is that at this kura they know they are loved."

Examples of the impact of this was shared by parents:

"The few times there has been a problem with his behaviour the kaiako have been able to resolve things like we do for him at home, they know what to do for him when he is feeling overwhelmed, and they take care to let us know what kind of a day he has had each and every day. If he's had a problem we talk about what happened and work out together what he needs. Sometimes we realise that there are small things that make him react."

"All we hoped for is that they would meet us halfway and they've done so much more than that."

Whānau told us that the kaiako and the kura go over and above what is required of them to support students' learning. They also manaaki ākonga with disabilities and/or learning support needs and adapt their teaching to work for all ākonga. For example, they adjust their teaching to allow ākonga to go at their own pace while also including them in the classroom and allow autistic ākonga to leave and re-join class whenever they need to.

A whānau member explained the positive impact this approach has had on her son:

"This kura and the people here it just made him feel safe to be him. And so they don't push him to try be like the others, they just nurture him at his own pace which is a huge strain on the resources that they currently have 'cause they don't have much. He doesn't have ORS funding. But they're willing to go out on a limb for our special needs [ākonga], I think they have 4-5 special needs kids here and they do what they can to make them feel included as well as lift their ability as well."

A staff member told us:

"Me aukati ki te kore taea te akomanga katoa ki te ako."
(We will not go ahead if the whole class can't learn or participate)

How the school creates a safe and inclusive environment where students feel accepted, respected, and connected and where bullying is prevented and responded to

Shared kaupapa is integral for the kura's success. It is built by the foundation of the relationships between kura, whānau, ākonga and community

Whānau told us that all staff are on board with the kaupapa of the kura, and that there are good communications and power sharing between the staff. There is no hierarchy; kaiako are able to give their ideas to the tumuaki freely.

Whānau also told us that there are good relationships between the staff, kura, and community with strong whānau involvement. This translates into a consistency of approach that embodies the kura values for the ākonga. From the bus driver to the parent who travels with ākonga on the bus, from each kaiako to the tumuaki, all display the values of the kura.

The new principal has demonstrated strong leadership, including a commitment to support kaiako and whānau

"Koira ngā momo rangatira pai ki au, kia aukati te raruraru, kia haumaru te kura katoa, ko ia tērā."
(These are the traits of a leader, to resolve the issues, to keep the whole kura safe, he is that).

Whānau told us that there has been an increase in whānau support since the arrival of a new tumuaki. Whānau told us that the tumuaki shows great leadership while also enabling kaiako and whānau to lead themselves. The tumuaki has built a foundation within the school that allows kaiako to voice their thoughts and ideas. The tumuaki holds space for whānau input into decision-making and has built strong relationships with the community and groups that support the school. This has allowed for a natural exchange of ideas and inclusiveness.

Whānau told us that driven by the leadership of the tumuaki, the kura has responded to barriers facing whānau. This has included the creation of an 0800 number which is available to whānau in need, enabling providing kai and creating lines of communication with whānau. Having these lines of communication open allows whānau to share any concerns they have with the kura:

"Kua kite au i tēnei kura, i tēnei tau, kei reira ētahi tamariki kāre e tau ana i ngā Rāhina."
(This year I have seen that students aren't very well settled on Mondays).

The kura creates a space where whānau can ask for help but does not force it. The responsibility is held by kaiako and all members of the staff

Kaiako told us that it is only possible to help whānau as much as they will let you. However, having the resources available helps. Staff assist whānau by assessing hurdles and responding to them with a plan. Whānau told us that there have been strategic solutions implemented, such as a kaiako accompanying students on the bus to and from school, which helps to prevent negative behaviour.

How the school involves whānau and the wider community

The kura goes to great lengths to create space for whānau voice

"Every time a whānau sits in this office, they leave, and their mana is still intact."

Whānau told us that the kura and kaiako value their voices and ensure their mana is always respected, and that the tumuaki has an open-door policy to ensure a safe space for whānau to raise any issues.

Kura strengthening iwi, marae and community relationships

Whānau told us that the kura strengthens connections to iwi and marae and promotes the sharing of knowledge between ākonga and kaumātua. They told us that the kura also coordinates with outside stakeholders to support ākonga and whānau. A whānau member gave an example of how this works:

"One of his things he has just established is a kaumātua mokopuna programme. He has teed up with [iwi], [marae] and [organisation] and they have a kaumātua programme where they go to [marae] every fortnight. Kaumātua will teach the kids how to cook and in return they will teach the kaumātua how to use technology. It's beautiful he's amazing. But also teaching us moteatea and even composing songs together."

Another example is how the kura has engaged with all the iwi in the area to create iwi graduate profiles for leavers to ensure they leave having a strong sense of connection to their marae and have the knowledge of their iwi. The tumuaki explained:

> "We are liaising with key iwi members in terms of what our graduate profile look like... What does a [iwi] tauira aged 12 look like when they leave our kura, same for [iwi] ... I want our tauira to be able to go into their whare tūpuna (ancestral house) and recite all the carvings and pou (poles)."

Whānau felt the kura working alongside the community, whānau and ākonga was a key part of its success.

Whānau involvement in wānanga and events

Whānau told us that there is a focus on increasing reo wānanga and including whānau as part of this. There is a wide involvement of staff, ākonga and whānau in marae and community events. Whānau are encouraged to be involved in school-wide wānanga, where the tumuaki and kaiako involve and seek feedback from whānau on decisions. One example was the decision to employ a parent to accompany ākonga on the bus to help ensure no bullying occurs to and from school.

Ākonga told us that some of their parents want to be more involved in the kura, but they were busy with mahi.

Support is needed to make students feel more accepted, respected, and connected at school

The kura is isolated from the city

> "Noho tawhiti tēnei kura, kati to tātou ao."
> (The kura is far away, shut out from the rest of the world).

Ākonga told us that barrier for them was that the kura is isolated from the city and that the bus was too expensive.

On the other hand, they utilise the long bus journey to reinforce the school values:

> "They focus on whakataukī and waiata on the bus which reinforces their school values."

The kura needs resources so they can better respond to the needs of ākonga

> "The Ministry needs a lot more faith in kura Māori."

Whānau told us that resources from the Ministry of Education are not easily accessible and that the Ministry has a lack of faith in the kura. Some whānau felt that the Ministry did not trust the kura with resources or the way they respond to issues. They told us that the application process for the Kai in Kura program has taken too long and that ākonga need kai urgently. This resulted in using the KidsCan programme, which they thought was a more efficient process.

"So if the whānau are low on kai, I'm pretty quick to dash to the kura and get some kai for them."

"If I could choose more support it would be more kaiako, a hall that has room for the kids to play and a space for karakia."

Ākonga told us that their moemoeā was for more resources, including a wharekura, a vehicle for the kura, more funding and more kai. They also told us that they would like to have a platform to speak in parliament, and to have three breaks a day.

Professional Development for staff is important

Staff told us that they wanted more professional development, and that they had positive experiences with previous professional development opportunities.

School Tuarua

Context

This school is a contributing school (years 1-6) located in the lower North Island with a roll of about 400 students. The student body is ethnically diverse. There is a growing number of disabled students and/or students who receive learning support.

Ways the school creates positive, inclusive, safe environments that help to prevent bullying

Staff take a team approach to teaching, which in turn models a collaborative way of working to students. This approach enables teachers to spend more time with students who need extra support and to resolve issues more quickly. Support staff also go above and beyond their role to manaaki and tautoko students. Examples included the caretaker running extracurricular activities for students.

Adults build relationships with students and spend time getting to know them in their whole context, enabling them to better meet students' needs. Staff support students to exercise their agency and voice, grounded in respect for them and their individual goals.

The school takes a restorative approach to bullying incidents, with a strong focus on enabling students to resolve issues themselves, at first if they can. However, teachers step in to support restoration of relationships if the students need it.

The school is exploring how it draws on and reflects te ao Māori and is working on building its general cultural capability. As part of this, staff and students have been learning about the local area through a programme for schools run by local mana whenua. To support this, some staff are also upskilling their reo Māori.

The school takes a number of intentional approaches to helping students feel accepted, respected, and connected at school. Examples include:

» Fostering strong connections with whānau and the wider community through whānau-led groups which fundraise and put on community gatherings

» Supporting students to undertake activities important to their culture or religion, such as going to the local mosque for Friday prayers

» Having relaxed start times at the beginning of the school day to help students connect with each other and ease into class

» Having dedicated free play areas

» Enabling new entrants and year 5/6 students to stay in the same class for multiple years, to allow strong relationships to be formed during key transition points.

What it means to feel "accepted, respected and connected"

Teachers have a key role in making students feel accepted respected and connected

Many students talked about how their teachers make them happy to come to school and enjoy learning.

Friends and family are crucial

Many students told us that having friends is important for feeling accepted, respected and connected. As one student said, *"every morning I always greet my friends, and they always greet me back."* (1A) Students also talked about the importance of family, including pets.

Ways students are made to feel accepted, respected and connected at this school

Staff model positive behaviour and relationships between themselves and with students

Students told us that teachers and students support each other.

Staff and whānau highlighted that staff model positive behaviour to students and each other and have strong positive relationships. This helps students to know what behaviour is expected. For example, the way staff work together shows students how to collaborate in their own learning.

One staff member put it this way:

"If you can create a safe place for the teachers, as they learn, they have to feel safe, confident, that they're not bullied; everything's trickle down … If you're not providing a safe, confident, comfortable area for your teachers, students are never going to feel loved, because they can see you're not expressing love to your colleagues … Our group of teachers plan together, talk together often; meet out on the deck a lot; kids always see them out there together – visibly together out there and quite close. Do have expectations as to what students should or shouldn't do and how they should act; respect in all its forms; aligned with values."

The school has an inclusive culture supported by strong relationships and a strengths-based approach.

Students told us they care about, learn from, and have fun with each other and that their teachers help sort out any issues.

Staff and whānau also commented on how supportive and inclusive students are of each other. One staff member told us:

"It's really struck me how incredibly patient the students are with each other and that sort of respect and tone that is throughout the class. For example, noticing when students are upset or needing a bit more support, and the students themselves are quick to offer that support themselves."

Staff and whānau told us that support staff, including those not in teaching support roles, go above and beyond their role in supporting students. Examples included running extracurricular activities for students and supporting students when they needed some cool-off time outside the classroom.

"He [the caretaker] organises sports at lunch for kids, organises games and soccer tournaments; runs basketball tournaments, does painting with kids, does a lot of things outside school; massive amount of stuff."

School encourages student agency through self-directed learning and leadership opportunities

Many students talked about how their learning is self-directed. Some said they enjoyed this approach as it allows them to choose what and how they learn, while some said they would prefer to have more structured learning.

They also talked about the leadership groups they are given the chance to sign up for and lead. They saw this as a way to "do stuff for the school" – for example, help run the breakfast club, set up assemblies, do environmental projects, help run sports events, or organise a welcome for new entrants. Students appreciated these opportunities and having staff support them to put their ideas into action.

Staff and whānau also talked about these initiatives which they saw as a positive way to involve students in the running of the school, according to their interests.

A parent commented:

"All kids are given a chance to be part of a group that spear headed a thing, I am amazed at the initiative my child was able to have …. That opportunity gives kids scope to feel like leaders with a range of options, because of everyone's different interests."

Alongside this, staff and whānau talked about the importance of supporting students to exercise agency and voice, grounded in respect for them and their individual needs and goals. The principal told us:

"Kaiako need to respect students, for them to respect you as the teacher it starts with respecting them. Learner agency – not a power play. It used to be, the teacher would sit at their desk and the students fill out their sheets. Now students have the autonomy to do what they need to do, the teacher is there to push their learning, challenge and support them. Respect where the child wants to be but if they think they aren't moving they can say well if you already know how to do that then maybe you aren't pushing yourself, but that it's done in a respectful way."

A parent said:

"My experience (I'm 33 now) in education felt like I had to follow the system, it was just a process to go through to get to uni or earning potential. What they've done now the kaiako are all about boosting them up in the classroom; they invite them to share that type of thing. For me it was 'shut up and pay attention'. Now the way the class is moving, they adjust the room, have individual set ups, lets the kids find their own space. They are open to kids expressing themselves how they like. I'm impressed with that."

One way this is shown is through students running their own learning conferences. Both staff and whānau and students saw this as a way for students to take ownership of their learning.

How the school creates a safe and inclusive environment where students feel accepted, respected, and connected and where bullying is prevented and responded to

The school takes a range of intentional approaches that create a positive and inclusive culture, driven by a commitment to try new things and continuously improve

Examples we were told about included having relaxed start times at the beginning of the school day, having dedicated free play areas, and having processes to enable new entrant and senior students feel settled.

Students told us that having a relaxed start time helped them to ease into class and spend time connecting with their friends.

Students also appreciated having lots of free space and play areas. Many students talked about how they liked having the option to "bring wheels" (for example, scooters and bikes) to school on certain days and go to the senior playground area with a buddy.

Staff and whānau told us that there are a number of ways new entrants are helped to settle into school. For example, by being invited to a "turning 5 party" before they start, which is organised by other students, school visits and having the option to stay in the same class for the entirety of the following year if they start school part-way through the year.

The school is taking steps to build its cultural capability

Staff and whānau talked about how the school is intentionally drawing on te ao Māori narratives and building general cultural capability, including a number of staff learning te reo. There was a sense that the school is being proactive about taking steps to build its cultural capability. A staff member told us:

"Used to be like that [tokenism]. You'd have the one person trying to get everyone on board and they'd be like 'why do we have to do this?' and that uneducated view. But now people are starting to know who's in front of them and recognise, then you have to take it on. This school's on a really good start to do that over the last few years. Teachers are taking themselves to te reo and taking it upon themselves to educate themselves. But there are schools in this area doing a really good job, and a lot of that is with a lot of staff with culture – I think."

However, a parent also made the point that the school needs to do this in a way that avoids "dial a kaumātua" type tokenism

There is a commitment to meet individual needs both in learning and when responding to concerns, grounded in strong relationships

Students told us that teachers support them to learn in ways that work for them, which helps them to feel accepted, respected and connected.

Staff build relationships with students at an individual level and spend time getting to know students in their whole context, enabling them to better meet students' needs. A staff member explained:

"The 'priority learners' are not boxed – they are just seen as learners. That's one way we are good. We don't lump kids into categories. (e.g. culture, target learner) They are all learners ... Focus on strengths and what they need to work on. We do still upskill staff to recognise and respond to cultural needs and identify how the school can help students access and celebrate their culture."

Staff told us such strong relationships are enabled by staff being trusted to teach and resolve issues according to their individual strengths, while also working collaboratively. A staff member told us:

"Teachers work collaboratively, know the kids. Also every time someone has an issue, the teachers respond in the same, responsive, equitable, way to address any issue. We need to let them know that we understand from their perspective it will look different."

The team approach to teaching enables staff to learn from and support each other and gives time and space to respond to issues in the classroom

Staff told us another way relationships have been built between staff and students is through collaborative teaching approaches.

Within the hubs teachers and teacher aides work together, building trust and ensuring students are well-supported. The school uses teacher aides flexibly across multiple classrooms, which works well. Students told us that they enjoy having a 'team' of teachers.

Staff told us that team teaching allows them to plan together, learn from one another and resolve issues within the classroom quickly. For example, one staff member can deal with an incident while the other continues teaching. A parent told us:

"I'm quite interested in how they use the teacher aide in my child's class; a child in her class has a fulltime teacher aide but the teacher aide doesn't only support the child - she supports the class generally and works in with the teachers which I quite like e.g. doing baking with the class while the teachers support students who need it – quite good to hear she is doing work within the class, not only to support the child but involved and included with the teachers as well."

A staff member told us:

"I [a teacher aide] have mornings with one student and the afternoon with another. Gives a nice switch to go with another child and be refreshed. I enjoy settling with the teacher; it makes a difference if you're getting on well with the teacher, works well."

Student wellbeing is prioritised, including during the COVID-19 lockdown period. However, COVID-19 related rules have made it more difficult for some parents to engage with staff

Students shared they feel safe at school because they know that there are people (friends and staff) around to help them if they need it.

Staff and whānau talked about a focus on students' physical safety and general wellbeing and this was prioritised during the COVID-19 lockdown period, which helped them settle back into school well. Students also talked about this and how they were supported to document their experience in a way that worked for them, for example, by drawing a picture or writing a story, and how helpful this was.

On the other hand, some parents told us that rules about not coming into the school implemented during the COVID-19 restrictions has made engaging with their child's teacher more difficult.

"COVID through most of this year – parents locked outside the gates, then when we were let back in they requested that parents don't come in cos they found it easier when we aren't around. The face to face with the teacher has gone down."

"I can go in and talk to the teacher, but at the moment, getting communication around "don't come in before school. Make a time and we'll find a space" – for Covid reasons. Teachers are more than happy to talk, but just tough if you can only make it in before school."

The school takes a restorative approach to bullying incidents, with a strong focus on enabling students to resolve issues themselves

Students told us they are supported to sort out bullying incidents themselves by, for example, each getting a chance to explain their side of the story and then working together to come up with a way forward, including possible consequences. A student explained:

"I know lots of bullies, they're mean and they hurt you. They kick you. I tell the teacher, and tell them that's not very nice. They'll [the teacher] will say stuff like that's not what we do at [school]. They'd say 'don't do that again, please' and then they'll sort it out – say sorry and that, then when everyone's happy they go and play."

On the other hand, some other students felt that the teachers "didn't do much about it" or "didn't take much control" when they were bullied.

Students had a range of suggestions for how to respond to incidents of bullying, including: intervening and sticking up for the person being bullied, befriending the person whose actions caused harm, getting a school counsellor, ignoring the bullying, having an anti-bullying club and talking to someone you trust.

Staff and whānau also highlighted the restorative approaches the school takes – giving students the time and space to explain what happened and working together to resolve issues. There was a strong focus on supporting students to resolve conflicts themselves, asking prompting questions where needed. A staff member explained:

"Get the group together, one at a time, everybody gets to share their story without being interrupted, and sometimes come to an agreement. How they feel, what went wrong, come to a resolution. Picked this up from other teachers. A typical situation in class: two kids, two sets of parents. Takes a long time. Need to put time in knowing what happened. Give that time. Kids that are in the wrong appreciate it. There's somebody here who wants to help and understand."

Staff emphasised that this approach centres on finding out the root cause of behaviour. They told us that both staff and students are still learning how to navigate this approach, but that exclusions are avoided at all costs. A staff member said:

"I think it comes down to what you're willing to accept for bullying – are you willing to accept those actions towards people? If you have good moral teachers, then you know what's right or wrong. So, I think again if you model, then students know. I think that's happening all over and people are doing well at making relationships throughout the school and that's knowing who your kids are and who their families are. You do have to change a little bit depending on who you're talking to – need to find out why students are lashing out, something going on and we need to work it out. So, you still have to say 'hey stop, that's not acceptable. We need to talk' but the next part as a teacher is to find out why that's happening. And also teaching what bullying is; so, bullying is not just calling a name, or taking someone's pencil. Have to be really clear what the meaning of bullying with kids. Like make sure, especially at the beginning of the year, you address what bullying is clearly."

How the school involves whānau and the wider community

The school and community are intertwined, with involvement and input from whānau, staff and the wider community

Staff and whānau told us that despite its larger size, the school has a "village feel" with a strong sense of community. Some parents we spoke to attended the school when they were students, so they are ingrained in the school community.

Along with staff, the wider school community has the opportunity to input into the strategic planning, which staff felt helps to strengthen the sense of community. The principal explained:

"Everyone is invited to strategic planning – staff and community and we have done them in 2015 and 2018 and will do another. Important for common understanding."

The school engages parents and the community in multiple ways which, whānau told us, help whānau feel connected to the school. Examples include school fundraising in collaboration with a parent-run group, holding an annual school-wide fun day which parents run, and supporting student-led club events. Students told us that parents often come on school trips. A parent said:

"I think [school] has always been big on fundraising, brings community together. Seeing the school develop like it's changed so much – keeps on getting better …. Heart-warming to see people pull together like that. You don't have to let the teachers take over. There's a lot you can do. It's quite easy as parents to see schools as somewhere you drop the kids off. But you see people come together and create relationships."

Staff and whānau also talked about how they appreciated being able to utilise facilities in the local community, for example, the beach and sports centre. The wider community supports the school, for example, through cafes donating food for events.

Staff engage with whānau in a variety of ways. Whānau had mixed experiences with the levels of communication from the school.

Staff and whānau told us that there are flexible and varied methods of communication. These include an open-door policy supplemented by a variety of online tools, such as Zoom, emails and online apps. The school also has newsletters or 'writing home.' This is complemented by sharing of students' learning which some staff told us has become more flexible and individualised. For example, instead of a written report at the end of the term, staff can send a recording, photo or video of students' learning to their whānau for them to comment on.
We heard about a range of other methods to engage with whānau, such as open days, the "turning 5" party and buddying senior students with junior students to help with transitions.

Some whānau told us that there is continuous and open communication with them. On the other hand, some said communications could be confusing or not frequent enough. For example, one parent told us that they work full time and found it difficult to communicate with staff if they didn't pick up or drop off their child from school. Another said they felt disconnected trying to resolve an incident over an app rather than face-to-face. Some staff felt that parents could be more involved in learning and after school activities.

Diversity is seen as important and is embraced, with room for further improvements

Staff and whānau talked about the diversity of the school community, both in terms of ethnicity and disability, being a strength. They identified the way everyone at the school is encouraged to accept each other. Because of this, there was a sense – both from staff and whānau - that students don't get bullied for being different. A staff member said:

"Kids are generally accepted and respected for who they are, especially in my class, I don't tolerate any bullying of race or culture, but I haven't had to deal with that which shows that the kids are accepting of each other. It's part of the community which is so diverse."

Another explained:

"The school is very diverse – on a whole, it's like, 'kids are kids', doesn't matter what part of the world they are from. But it is hugely diverse e.g. Muslim kids having prayer sessions at school, Fridays go down to the mosque. That's just how it runs. Intertwine quite nicely and no one thinks anything different."

A parent recounted:

"Son came home and he had made a friend named X. He would always talk about this X, X this and X that. I said to him one day 'what nationality is X?' and he said 'what do you mean?' I said 'is he Samoan?' and he said 'no'. I asked him another question then said 'is he white or is he brown?' And he goes mum, 'he is just X'. It showed me that it doesn't matter his nationality or ethnicity it is just his friend named X."

On the other hand, some staff and whānau told us they would like to see more being done to ensure diverse communities are engaged with and reflected in the school in a meaningful way, including the hiring of a more diverse range of staff members. A parent said:

"What I'd like to see more here, is getting more voice and contribution from our more diverse community, make sure we achieve engagement with mana whenua, build authentic connections with people. Not dial a kaumātua. That's always been my thing I'm very open about that. Think we should all be pushing for that. Schools have a Treaty mandate for that."

A staff member told us:

"The diversity of kids not reflected in diversity of staff – not ethnically diverse. The part timers, there are some, but the full timers are very white."

The school has gone through a significant change process over several years which staff and whānau have different, albeit generally positive, perspectives on

Both staff and whānau talked about the significant changes that had occurred at the school since the senior leadership changed six years ago. This had caused upheaval at times. Those who had been at the school a long time sometimes had different perspectives to newer staff. However, people were generally positive about where things have ended up.

Support is needed to make students feel more accepted, respected, and connected at school

The school is well resourced, but still calls for more funding and filling of existing resourcing support gaps

Both staff and whānau recognised the local community is generally well-resourced compared to other schools. This enables them to start from a different baseline in supporting students. However, adults also said they could do even more with more resourcing and that this should be more holistic. Some staff also felt the Ministry of Education needs to reduce the administration teachers have to do so they can focus on teaching. A staff member put it this way:

> "You can put money in this school, but in other schools you need to put money in the community, because of different socioeconomics. This school can do a lot – because we've got resources and more resources would be wonderful – because then we could bring in people to learn about our culture and feel supported and respect other people. And our kids just need to respect other people, because we are not in poverty, a lot of us."

Another staff member explained:

> "Sometimes wonder if support is too siloed for students. SENCO role works with so many agencies to get supports of different types for a child. If the Ministry had better connection with other support systems for students. Stop resourcing singularly. … Need wrap around support rather than working in silos – tie support together so don't need to repeat the same story to different agencies. SENCO can't manage it all on her own."

Students had a range of ideas about how their school could improve

Ideas that students had included: making changes to how the play areas are used (for example, juniors being allowed on the senior playground), introduce an anonymous box system to identify bullying incidents, going on more trips and having all-school parties.

School Tuatoru

Overarching Summary

Context

This full primary school (years 1-8) is located in the central North Island. There is a mixture of English medium, bilingual Māori and immersion Māori medium classrooms. More than 400 students attend. Most students are Māori, with a significant number of Pacific students too.

Ways the school creates positive, inclusive, safe environments that help to prevent bullying

Whānau, whanaungatanga and connection to/through whakapapa formed the foundation of this school, creating an incredible sense of community and trust from whānau. The school has deliberately employed whānau members from the school community. The school principal and deputy principal have whānau connections to students. They model whanaungatanga in their approach to leadership.

The school felt welcoming. Students were greeted when they arrive each morning, and many students greeted us. Tuākana-tēina relationships between students are a way for students to show respect and kindness to each other.

Students are always welcome in key spaces within the school including the principal's office, deputy principal's office and the staffroom. Students know they can access the staffroom to get food and to be looked after, after school, until their whānau can come and pick them up.

Whānau are a valued and integral part of the school. The school tries to be a support hub by doing things such as dropping off food packages to whānau during lockdown. The school reaches out to whānau and communities for involvement in school celebrations, such as language weeks.

The school has an embedded values matrix that was designed by the whole school community. The matrix is displayed in every room and the buildings and playgrounds are painted in its three colours. Staff also reinforce the messages in the values matrix during teaching. As a result, students hold their whānau and staff accountable to the values.

The school responds to reports of bullying quickly. The students have clear boundaries on acceptable behaviour and stick up for each other. When bullying occurs, students know how to respond. We were told they often mediate disputes amongst themselves. For example, they hold a hui and then involve teachers when they feel it necessary. All students know about the paperwork the school completes when bullying occurs and they help fill out the form which goes to whānau.

What it means to feel "accepted, respected and connected"

Actions that show respect and kindness

Students shared lots of different examples of how people made each other feel accepted, respected and connected including welcoming and greeting others, giving hugs, including other students in games, and checking on students who look sad. Students also told us they are greeted every day at the school gates by their principal and deputy principal. *"[T]hey say good morning by your name, or they high five you and say good morning."* (Small group walking tour, year 6,7,8).

Ways students are made to feel accepted, respected and connected at this school

Strong relationships amongst staff and students and whānau, with whakapapa connections

When we asked students at this school what being connected meant to them, they talked about the importance of feeling connected to others. They told us that these connections are linked to feeling accepted and that connections are important for them to feel safe.

There are strong whakapapa connections, intergenerationally linking students, staff and whānau at this school and with the wider community. Most staff, and many students, had relatives at the school, such as cousins, siblings and aunties.

Many staff had been part of the school community for many years. One teacher who had a long relationship with the school, first as a student, then as a teacher aide before training as a teacher and returning, told us "whanaungatanga - that's always been here, always been a part of here". She and others described the teaching staff, particularly staff teaching in te reo Māori, as a whānau, along with their students. These relationships last beyond school years and extend out into the community. Several staff members shared how past students will still make time to say hello and talk to them when they see each other in the neighbourhood.

Relationships at this school were described as supportive and trusting. Students told us that the school has a strong village feel where everyone is whānau and that there are strong relationships between students and staff. Students told us that trust is vital. This was a key thing they said that all adults need to grow and build so that students feel safe engaging with them.

Staff and whānau told us that everyone at the school is made to feel accepted, respected and connected and that this reaches out beyond the school to whānau and high school students.

Staff and whānau told us that the students trusted adults at the school and felt safe to ask for help from them. They told us that the leadership at the school is accessible, approachable and transparent.

Staff highlighted the importance of building trusted relationships with students and their whānau. This can mean being less formal and more flexible in approaches, and making sure that rather than ticking boxes, everything that happens in school is child and whānau centred. For example, this can mean stopping to meet a child's needs, such as feeding them, before expecting them to learn.

Students at the school also have strong relationships with each other. We observed them actively supporting and helping each other to resolve issues.

A strengths-based approach, with students at the centre

Whānau told us that teachers at the school go beyond what is expected of them because they understand the importance of recognising every child as important, unique, and worthy of having their needs understood. Students talked about being acknowledged and supported by teachers. Pedagogy is done in a learner-centred, strengths-based way. The school has a focus on setting time aside for self-directed learning. Staff then nurture each student's passions through supporting them to pursue interest areas whether that is coding, sports, or music.

Students and staff understand and use a values matrix actively

The school has created a school-wide values matrix developed with input from staff, students and whānau. There are three core values. In printouts of the matrix each value has descriptions underneath of how the value is to be embodied. Staff and whānau told us this helps everyone understand what is expected of them, how they can be their best and treat others well.

Students told us the values matrix helps them to be generous and caring. Similarly, adults said the values help everyone treat each other in ways that make people feel accepted, respected and connected. They said that students are nurtured within the school and have the confidence to speak up. A staff member told us that *"Whānau are given it to put on their fridges and in their homes, it comes out of their kids mouths. They would ask 'are you showing [the values]?' 'are you being a good role model?'"*

Leaders at this school gave examples of how students felt comfortable approaching them if staff members weren't upholding the values. Leaders told us they raised these issues with staff, with a focus on discussing how they could do better in future.

The school acknowledges and celebrates different backgrounds, cultures and languages Students expressed the importance of being able to see yourself in the world and the school that you are growing up in. One of the students showed us their favourite place, which was a mural, and told us:

"It shows our cultures… it makes you feel like part of the school. If you are from Hawai'i you come and see your island and it makes you want to stay here. When people come in they feel like they are already part of the whānau and they stay here." (small group walking tour Year 6,7,8).

Common themes from students we spoke with included seeing themselves reflected in their classroom and school. Staff also talked about the school embracing each of the students' unique identities. One grandparent shared an example:

"From my perspective, being Pākehā myself whereas my grandson is part Māori part Pākehā, the fact that he is a freckled face white boy in the bilingual class, it doesn't matter."

Staff and whānau identified having pedagogy and content that is culturally affirming as being an important enabler that has helped the school to be an inclusive and positive place. This includes celebrating all cultures and whānau, so that everyone in the school is exposed to and learns more about each other's diversity, including in first languages other than English.

How the school creates a safe and inclusive school environment where students feel accepted, respected, and connected and where bullying is prevented and responded to

Whānau relationships - everyone supporting, building trust, and actively helping each other

Students told us about how they are connected through whānau and through the house system. They talked about how they learn together and support each other. This is an enabler that helps students treat each other with kindness, because of their strong relationships.

Building relationships was also important to the adults. They told us that the school has created a whānau environment and models a culture of support and safety across the wider school community. Relating to each other in these ways helps to prevent negative behaviours like bullying.

Some staff and whānau told us that the school maintains a clear culture of safety, which can be different from the community where things can feel less safe. They said there are a number of stressors and things going on in the wider community, but the community understands that any issues stop at the school gate and do not happen at school. We observed an incredible sense of community and trust from whānau, who know the school is a safe place for students and whānau. One staff member said:

"I think relationships are a really big thing. And if they're not made, right at the beginning, that's where the issues lie. The majority of the adults, staff here, do make those relationships with our kids. Trust. This is a safe place for a lot our kids. Knowing they can come to us and be safe. The relationships that get made and the trust that the students have in the majority of the staff. I think that's a really big thing."

Strong and trusted leadership is one of the factors some staff and whānau said was behind the school's success. The principal and deputy principal were trusted by the community to work hard to do their best for students and whānau.

School leadership embodies expectations, and supports staff to meet them

We were told about how the leaders at the school set and embody the expectations that they have for staff and support them to meet those expectations. A staff member told us: *"Good management is key. It starts at the top. The journey this school has been on -the principal and deputy principal are heading in the right direction, doing the right thing. I can go to them as a mum. They always listen."*

Another staff member said: *"The standard in this school doesn't change, that's because of who we are. We expect the best for our kids, we expect the best from them. We won't [just] accept what's in front of us. And that comes a lot down to the staff and the management in this school. They set high expectations for us, for the kids, for this school."*

Staff go above and beyond to meet the needs of students and whānau

Students told us about how they have friendly teachers who help and look after them and give them positivity and joy. Students talked about how they are looked after by staff at the school including being given what they need to do well; things such as food, devices such as iPads to help with learning, opportunities for fitness and yoga, and hand sanitiser. The school also had a counsellor to support students. Students said having these things was an important part of feeling accepted, respected and connected.

The whānau that we spoke with described how kaiako and other staff collectively go above and beyond for students. They spoke about the importance of taking time to build trust and relationships with the students. Adults told us that the students at the school have a variety of complex needs which are barriers to learning including health and housing. They told us that the school tries to be a support hub for whānau. For example, we were told about the school dropping off food packages to whānau during lockdown.

> *"Something we do as well, we know sometimes tamariki do things because they're hungry, they need a lie down. They have days when they're not doing their best. It's ok. And if they're hungry, sometimes the support is we give them something to eat. Sometimes all they need is a milo and to sit down and talk to an adult. We sort of judge each child and their circumstance. When a support form comes through as well it's not punitive, not always about consequences, it's "how can we support this child now". Sometimes all they need is someone to talk to. They just need somebody to listen to them. What's the bigger picture here – what's gone on for them? What's going on for them at home? In class?"*

Staff and students interact with each other in positive, strength-based ways

The students that we spoke with talked about positive actions and language which they express to each other such as showing kindness, welcoming each other, being proud and supporting each other.

Staff and whānau told us that the kaiako, kaimahi and the school use positive strengths-based approaches, actions and language particularly with the students. One staff member said:

> "What we realised, going through the PB4L process, was that you actually need to teach our tamariki how to do these things. If we say a tamaiti doesn't know how to read, it's the teacher's job to teach them that. If a tamaiti doesn't know how to make good choices in the classroom or know how to listen to the speaker, then it's our job to teach them how to do that. We've created a bank of lesson plans to actually teach this. That's evolved over the years. It's a really consistent schoolwide approach."

The school's values matrix shows what good looks like and sets clear boundaries

A common theme for staff and whānau at this school was that the values matrix has strong positive expectations and creates the basis for a resolution process. They told us that because it sets clear boundaries, students understand the expectations and understand the consequences when they don't meet them. The process followed is the same in each case, with staff using a support form to go through a series of questions with students involved. Staff said this helps them listen to each child involved and understand how to support them and meet their needs to find a resolution. Whānau are involved from both sides in this process. Staff and whānau told us that when addressing student behaviour, it is important for staff to maintain trust and safety with students and whānau and to preserve their mana.

The students that we spoke to wanted students at other schools to have a values matrix that they could use. Staff also talked about the importance of this matrix and how it helped them with planning and following through when responding to bullying. A number of staff and whānau at this school named it as one of the most important things the school had done to create a positive and inclusive environment where bullying is prevented and responded to.

They recommended that other schools have set processes to help respond to bullying and come up with shared values and expectations which are clearly explained to students. They explained that there is a sense of fairness when students understand what is expected from them, know the process and know it will be the same for all their peers. This means that when they act in ways that cause harm they are more likely to accept that they need to take responsibility for fixing their mistakes.

At this school, this values matrix also formed a shared kaupapa. Staff and whānau told us that it was important that schools have a clear commitment to their kaupapa and students and that they stick with it and support students even when things get hard. One staff member said:

> "Students know their boundaries, but are also encouraged to share their ideas, work in groups, work collaboratively and also with the teachers. An example is the tone used to talk to students. They are naturally friendly and are able to build trust with staff. They know that within the school grounds, they are the priority."

Bullying response - having whānau, staff, friends who listen and support, using the values matrix as a base

The students we spoke with talked about the importance of feeling they could tell people about bullying and having someone listen. Some students talked about feeling that you can't tell anyone, and to be a 'wuss'. They valued a community approach to resolving bullying, including whānau, the fairness of everyone being listened to (by teachers) and the importance of both the person whose actions caused harm and the person who was mistreated being helped. They understood that everyone takes responsibility to help resolve bullying. They said that people bully for a reason and that they might need help and support, such as counselling.

The school staff liked using the values matrix as it helps students to understand their boundaries and the process for resolution. They told us that going through the same process of filling out support forms using the matrix helped with consistency in responses to bullying. They also told us that maintaining trust and mana during the process of addressing bullying was important. One staff member explained:

"A lot of kids come to you and talk about different things. Bullying is not accepted. It's good because the students that do get bullied, once they've had a talk and gone to the office and had whānau and stuff like that it makes a difference. It's nice to be in a school that's like that, with no bullying. 99% of them, they just work it out, sit in a room. Or otherwise it's just the students that want them – the class teacher – sit down and discuss it and then we discuss it as a class. Things come out and it gets addressed in the classroom. And they do feel that they can come to us and talk to us without being scared or anything like that."

How the school involves whānau and the wider community

Driving broad engagement with whānau and community

The school actively engages with parents, whānau and the community in a range of ways. Teachers proactively seek ways to engage with and support parents. This includes through texts, calls, and in person. The school reaches out to whānau and communities for involvement in school celebrations, such as language weeks. During these weeks, communities were invited to come together to cook and share food. Community members have also been invited to be involved in celebrating culture in other ways (for example, building structures and painting murals within the school).

Staff talked about lots of different ways of connecting positively and proactively with whānau, providing them with opportunities and support. This included giving whānau opportunities to display items they made (such as jewellery) for sale in the school foyer. Staff communicate in a range of ways and recognise that different families have different preferences. This includes reaching out with phone calls and texts and providing updates on the school Facebook page. This is another way whānau can get in touch or ask questions, especially as the platform is free to use.

The principal, deputy principal and staff working at reception all talked about the importance of being friendly and available face to face, as many whānau members will take the opportunity to check in when they are dropping off or picking up their child, or sorting something out at the office. They told us this helps with regular positive interactions and relationship building, as well as providing an avenue for discussing problems students might be facing, including bullying. One staff member said:

> "Just welcoming. Always have time for them, doesn't matter where you are. Same applies for them as the kids. If they wanna chat, wanna come in and see what their kids are learning about, just let that happen. Always make sure it's a friendly welcoming, warm environment for them, anytime. Most teachers should have relationships with their whānau. I know they text them, tell them stuff that's going on. We've got this going on, come in. A majority of the teachers would do that. They can always ring the office, happy to answer any questions."

Open door policy to enable whānau unrestricted access

Staff talked about how they always make parents and whānau feel welcome to come and visit their child at school or sit in the child's classroom. Whānau don't have to be invited to come to school.

Reaching out to whānau who are harder to connect with

Staff and whānau talked about the importance of proactively seeking ways to engage with and support parents, and not giving up on them. Staff reflected that many parents and whānau might have had bad experiences with education in the past, and that this can stop them from engaging with the school or make them think that all contacts from the school will be negative. Staff work hard to turn this around and try to engage these families in positive ways.

Student leadership, agency and engaging with the wider community

Students told us it was important at all schools to give students leadership opportunities, responsibilities and the space to use their voices.

Staff and whānau told us about the opportunities students have to be leaders in engaging with the wider community and service. This includes taking groups of students to help at a local rest home, or students helping to pick up rubbish in the community. Staff encourage students to exercise their own agency, to take responsibility for themselves and to look after each other including through tuākana – tēina relationships between older and younger students. Some of these are formally supported, and some of these relationships are organic. We saw that older students on the playground were consciously looking out for younger students.

Some of the staff and whānau named self-directed learning opportunities, and the time the school sets aside for this, as being one of the key reasons the school is doing well. The time the school sets aside for self-directed learning nurtures each child's skills and interests, but more importantly, their confidence and self-worth. Some staff said it helps bring shy students out of their shells, and others said that after self-directed learning time, students were more settled in the classroom.

School Tuawhā

Context

This contributing school (year 1-6) is located on the east coast of the South Island. It has approximately 260 students from a range of ethnic backgrounds. There are a significant number of disabled students and/or students receiving learning support. There are two bilingual English-Te Reo classes. There is an Early Childhood Education Centre and high school nearby which interact with the school.

Ways the school creates positive, inclusive, safe environments that help to prevent bullying

Staff prioritise building relationships with the students and see them in the wider context of their whānau. There is a village feel to the school, and it is considered a "hub" amongst both staff and the wider community. Staff in the office, particularly the receptionist, were noted as being welcoming and knowing students and their whānau. There is regular communication with whānau and a sense that staff are open to resolving issues.

Staff support students to know how to treat to each other through role modelling and having strong, supportive relationships with each other. Designated student leaders are supported to help resolve minor playground incidents and role play common scenarios that require resolution.

The school collects student data regularly as part of an ongoing reflective practice to identify areas of concern and implement appropriate support, including learning and behaviour support, and support with basics, such as food, where needed. In addition, at the beginning and end of the year, staff spend time with each other to share information about students that are coming to their class. This includes sharing knowledge about their whānau and community, which then informs how they are taught and supported.

Teachers have a range of teaching and learning approaches that are responsive to the needs of individual students; for example, not having mandatory homework, or making lessons relevant to students' interests outside of school. Another example of this was an autistic student being supported to choose to move to a quiet space, if the noise level, or anything else in the classroom became overwhelming for him.

The school celebrates the diversity of students through practicing karakia and waiata, running student cultural groups, displaying flags of the countries the students are from, and celebrating significant cultural festivals and getting involved in community events.

Staff told us many students at the school have experienced trauma, which needs to be addressed before students are ready to learn. The school has a fulltime Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO), access to a social worker (shared with two other schools), a Learning Support Coordinator (shared with two other schools), and support from the Mana Ake initiative. The combination of these roles means that holistic wraparound support is available to students and their whānau.

What it means to feel "accepted, respected and connected"

Whānau, food and safe spaces are important for students to feel accepted, respected and connected

Students told us whānau (including pets) and having food available at school through breakfast and lunch clubs, helps make them feel accepted, respected and connected.

Different spaces within their school where students feel safe were talked about, such as breakout rooms they can go into when they need some time and space. On the other hand, some students wanted to see more resources in their school, including more spaces to play and sports equipment.

Ways students are made to feel accepted, respected and connected at this school

Building relationships through doing things together

Students described how strong relationships with whānau, friends and school staff help them feel accepted, respected and connected. They described activities and objects that can make them feel more connected, for example toys and material goods, and activities such as reading, sports, playing games, dancing with friends, painting, gymnastics and cultural performances. Having opportunities to share food together was also mentioned.

Students emphasised that relationships are built on having respect for each other. They told us that there are lots of ways that students and people show respect to each other at school. For example, allowing others to join in, helping their classmates, people thinking about what they say before they say it and people showing empathy to each other.

Staff and whānau gave a range of examples as to how these strong relationships are built, such as staff sitting with the students while they eat their lunch, teacher aides running games for students at lunchtime, and having a school-wide shared lunch every term, which many whānau support.

Staff and whānau told us the school provides support for them, as well as students, which helps to build relationships. For example, providing food parcels to families in need, and running a weekly lunch club where a group of parents volunteer to make lunches for students for $1.

"There is a real culture of making people feel comfortable to ask for support – by being non-judgemental and treating people with respect. Makes the hard phone calls when concerns do arise easier – and take a proactive approach to these, rather than waiting for things to bubble up."

Shared values and expectations

Students talked about the values they share at school, which included kindness, loyalty, love for one another, caring for each other, respect and community. Some students in the bilingual unit used te reo to explain the values, such as kaitiakitanga and pono. The adults talked about how there was shared (and expected) manaakitanga within the school. Other values at school included learning, creating and sharing in relation to the school's digital curriculum approach.

Staff explained they reward student behaviours aligned with these values through a card-based system that duty teachers hand out in the playground, and school-wide "fun days" twice a term, where students get to do fun activities of their choosing for the afternoon.

> "We have kete cards to reinforce positive behaviour the duty teachers see in the playground; they hand them out, then the cards go into a kete. Three cards are pulled out every assembly; those three students go see [the principal] to get something out of the goody box."

Accepting and understanding students in their whole world

Students gave examples of ways they are made to feel accepted, respected and connected at school: being listened to and congratulated for trying their best, spending time with friends who make you want to go to school, and knowing that they are special. On the other hand, being left out, not knowing who to ask for support, and not being asked to join in by other students were identified as barriers to feeling accepted, respected and connected.

Staff and whānau talked about how the school makes an effort to get to know individual students, including their language, identity and culture. There is a strong focus on knowing the learner individually, including knowing what support they need to succeed, and celebrating those successes. A staff member told us:

> "Staff really focuses on knowing the families — not just the students — but their entire family. Staff often sit with the support staff and say, "What's actually going on at home?" so really aware of where students are coming from and their culture as well."

Staff and whānau also spoke about how there is respect for, and acceptance of, differences, and that this contributed to students and their whānau feeling safe and valued. As one staff member put it, "children seem to inherently know that differences are a part of life."

Another staff member said:

> "Children are really accepting of kids who need support. Kids don't mock them — they are part of the class, but they just accept it; kids just carry on with their work and let the teacher deal with it. Teachers also accept kids saying hello to the teacher aides when they come into the class, brilliant, really good."

Staff and whānau told us that when incidents occur, they are resolved promptly and empathetically, with a focus on addressing the root cause of behaviour. A staff member said:

> "All teachers are very nurturing – if kids exhibit that type of [bullying] behaviour, teachers "wrap them in love" recognising that such behaviour means they are probably not getting love themselves ... and there are lots of things going on for them."

Students' cultures are embraced and supported in an inclusive way

The importance of, and respect for, cultural diversity was something many adults told us about. For example, through practicing karakia, waiata, running cultural groups for the students to participate in, displaying flags of the countries the students are from, and celebrating significant cultural festivals. Staff recognised the need to continue to build the school's culturally responsive practice. A staff member said:

> "If you have cultural connectivity, it can make a big difference to students' lives. Just small things sometimes e.g. starting the day with Samoan prayer, all the Pasifika boys are really into it."

Another reflected:

> "Diversity a strength of [school]- very diverse school – whānau involve staff in their different cultural celebrations e.g. bringing a plate in for Diwali, inviting them home. That's really cool."

Another example is the display of flags of students' home countries in the school office as a way to show students their cultures, languages, and identities are valued. Staff recognised students and whānau seeing their cultures reflected in the school as important. The principal explained:

> "One of the most powerful things we talk about at [school] is "knowing the learner" and so that involves language, culture and identity and so when those students and families and whānau walk in the gate, they feel a connection and see something they connect to. Should not have to take off his "Māori backpack" at the gate to succeed at [school]."

They added that this included "pronouncing students' name correctly."

Using tikanga Māori in the running of the classroom

Staff working in the bilingual classes described how tikanga helps the school to operate in ways that ensure that students feel accepted, respected, connected, and can resolve issues. A teacher told us *"Ka hono mātou ērā o ngā tikanga ki te ao wairua"* (3N), in the context of how they connect to methods of spirituality to reset in the classroom. For example, when students are upset, they stop, settle, and pass a mauri stone around. This gives them an opportunity to talk about their feelings and sort out issues straight away.

How the school creates a safe and inclusive environment where students feel accepted, respected, and connected and where bullying is prevented and responded to

Supporting students to meet expectations through role modelling

Staff and whānau said that staff model positive behaviour to students and this is reflected in how students interact, both with each other and staff. A staff member told us:

> "Staff at [school] are good role models. For example, we try to show how kids should dress e.g. wearing hats, no point asking the kids to do something if we don't do it also."

Staff told us students are empowered to role model expectations to each other particularly through student leaders who are supported to help resolve minor incidents and role play common scenarios - both through videos and in person at assemblies - that require resolution (for example, a disagreement in the playground). The principal explained:

> "On alternate weeks, have a "values assembly" on a Monday, generally driven by data about what's happening in the playground or classroom at the time to make it relevant or authentic; might get some of the [student leaders] to come up and role play an appropriate response to an incident; model the behaviour concerned (e.g. students pushing each other), and then model how it should have been handled. Students love seeing peers and staff roleplaying."

A staff member said:

> "Staff will actively encourage [student leaders] to develop their own thinking by asking "what have you seen as problem today?" "How could you solve that?" "what can we do next time?""

Another told us:

> "This empowers students to deal with issues themselves. They are trusted; kids just accept that that's their role."

Students gave multiple examples of these expectations, including thinking about what you say and how you act, being nice rather than mean, and showing empathy to other students. Students also told us about the importance of allowing other students to join in with what they're doing. They also talked about being an "upstander, not a bystander" when an incident is happening.

Staff also talked about the importance of getting enough time and support to get to know and support students individually. A staff member reflected:

> "There needs to be consideration of how you build relationships with your students. Being given the time to ensure you as a teacher are well prepared to set up good relationships with your students."

Some staff told us that having access to technology through the school's focus on the digital curriculum is also helpful. The school has a big focus on digital learning, with each student having access to a Chromebook. Blogging is used as a way for students to share their work and give feedback on each other's work. Staff, including teacher aides, and whānau, also often comment on the blogs. This helps to build a sense of belonging across the school community as students know people take an interest in the work they produce.

Strong leadership and internal staff relationships

Staff talked about how the school leadership operates on a high trust model, is supportive and responsive to issues, and prioritises staff wellbeing. An example of this is how they run the duty roster, which ensures teachers on duty get time to have a morning tea or lunch break. A staff member explained:

> "When a teacher is on duty, a teacher aide will come into the class and release the duty teacher early. This means they can have their morning tea, use the bathroom, then do the same after lunch. This means teachers can be out on duty when the bell rings. Teachers also sit with the students to eat lunch (and monitor their eating), which is good relationship building. I haven't seen this focus on supporting teacher wellbeing in this way before."

They also told us that there is community between staff members:

> "This school has a supportive culture. Each staff have a mentor."

They also talked about the principal being approachable:

> "Staff have an open relationship with [principal] – you can approach everyone here. Kids can also approach anyone including [principal] – to show them their work; [principal] will happily see them when he's asked to."

Another staff member said:

> "We can go to [SENCO] about anything; we are given flexibility in how we work; don't have to answer to anyone. We are trusted to just do it (the job)."

Staff and whānau talked about how teacher aides are a valued part of the staff and wider school community. They told us that the teacher aides are used strategically within the school and have an important role to play in building relationships with students, helping them to make friends and develop social skills. A staff member explained:

"Teacher aides are matched with particular students depending on their skills/strengths – all have a huge range of expertise e.g. family with background of trauma. Support each other well and really generally care about the kids – give kids lots of attention. Even kids without teacher aides want teacher aides to help them just because it is so "cool" – teacher aides have really good relationships with a large number of kids, not just those who they support."

Access to internal and external support

Staff and whānau recognised the school has access to a range of internal and external supports, including a fulltime SENCO, a social worker as part of the Social Workers in Schools programme, a Learning Support Coordinator, Mana Ake and social service agencies across the city. This ensures that "no one is left to their own devices" (3M) and families have access to essential support, such as food parcels, both in term time and in the school holidays.

The principal reflected:

"We are fortunate we have been funding SENCO for the last 7-8 years full time; if we didn't have a SENCO, I would be doing it. The SENCO does a range of things including organising teacher aides, planning interventions, doing referrals, in-class support referrals, RTLB [Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour] referrals, liaising with classroom teachers, ORS [Ongoing Resource Scheme] applications – which takes time- but is invaluable. She spends a lot of time on pastoral care."

The school was looking to take support even further, for example, by working with the social service agencies to plan for families who need support throughout the summer holiday period through providing holiday programme subsidies or respite care. Families see this support as positive and are not hesitant to ask for it, thanks to the strong relationships staff have built with them. Staff acknowledged that the school is privileged to have access to so many layers of support as this is not the case for all schools.

Access to professional development for staff

Staff told us they feel they have good access to relevant professional development which helps them to improve their teaching practice and support students. A staff member noted:

"There is the opportunity for support for us as teachers before we even get into the classroom. For example, courses related to autism."

Another said:

"I'm happy with the level of professional development I receive generally; though it would always be nice to have some release time to go to other schools."

How the school involves whānau and the wider community

Actively building a strong sense of community through events and activities

Staff and whānau talked about how there is a supportive feel to the school which is underpinned by strong communication with whānau. Whānau told us that:

"Teachers are approachable. If you have a problem, you can always approach them first. Community is very supportive."

They told us the school makes efforts to get to know students and their whānau holistically, which helps to make the school feel more welcoming. A teacher told us that:

"It's very important to build relationships with students before you can teach them. Sometimes teachers will leave their plan and just go with the flow."

The iceberg image was used to describe the needs that a child may have. A staff member explained:

"You see what's on top but as a teacher in order to build strong relationships with students, you must take a holistic approach and take times to know what's under the surface."

Staff told us students are seen as every teacher's responsibility, rather than just their class teacher. This also helps to create community.

Staff told us that whanaungatanga is actively fostered through connections between siblings and with whānau, particularly within the bilingual classes at the school. One of the kaiako in the class said:

"We have all the whānau in [the unit] so this is something that strengthens the whanaungatanga within [the unit]."

Staff and whānau said that the school is a hub for the community amongst both staff and whānau and the wider community. For example, the school regularly puts on events and activities that whānau get involved with, such as cultural performances, school-wide shared lunches, and a support group for parents of students with learning support needs and/or disabilities. A staff member told us:

"There is a shared lunch each term – lots of parents come along to that … Some parents bring plates for the staff as well which is lovely – makes them feel really welcome. During the shared lunch they also have trestles filled with shoes and clothes donations that families can just take – some students are really excited to take home new clothes and shoes."

Culture of relationship building and commitment to supporting each other from principal to student level

Students noted the importance of having friends and whānau involved at school. They told us, they trust and respect staff, including the principal.

Students told us they sometimes need support from the adults around them to deal with how they are feeling. They want other students to know that they are not alone in not feeling accepted, respected and connected sometimes. They wanted students to be able to help each other when they are being bullied, including providing support for people who are bullying. Some suggested a movie be made about how bullying affects people and for this to be shown to schools.

Open communication and willingness to provide support

Staff and whānau talked about a culture of communicating openly and honestly. This enables staff and whānau to work together to support students and resolve issues.

Staff and whānau told us the school is intentional in keeping whānau updated on what's happening at school and students' learning. This includes a fortnightly newsletter. They also talked about a parent support group which the SENCO runs alongside parents of disabled children and/or those receiving learning support, and how it helps whānau to connect with the school and the local community and vice versa. A staff member explained:

"The monthly parents support group is really good. Word is getting out that that's happening – even for parents of students outside the [Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako] cluster. Have professional people along e.g. the local police constable."

Staff explained that the trust and relationships which are built through keeping in regular contact means that issues can be resolved quickly. It also means whānau feel empowered to ask for support when necessary without stigma, including for basics like food. A staff member reflected:

"Parents now feel comfortable with emailing regularly asking for the school to feed kids – whereas previously would keep the child at home. Quite a large contingent now, become socially acceptable to ask. Relationship with the families and treating them with respect, responding positively when parents do ask, has enabled this to happen. Real culture of making people feel comfortable to ask for support – by being non-judgemental and treating people with respect."

Support is needed to make students feel more accepted, respected, and connected at school

Some staff told us having more physical learning spaces would be useful:

"More learning spaces – just so we know the room is going to be available when you need it to be; a few more breakout rooms would be amazing. Just so you can leave your resources somewhere, the room if there for you and then it's done – don't have to take resources with you. Would also allow students to display their work more easily – feel like you are invading another person's space without a set room."

School Tuarima

Overarching Summary

Context

This full primary school (year 1-8) is in a rural community in the North Island. It has a small roll and provides both English medium and Māori medium teaching options with a Rūma Rumaki Reo. There is an Early Childhood Centre behind the school, as well as an alternative education unit for high school students on site. Most of the students and staff are Māori. Te reo Māori is visible in most signage, information posters, and art throughout the school as well as in the students' work. It is heard during classroom lessons as well as in general conversations between the principal, staff, and the students.

Ways the school creates positive, inclusive, safe environments that help to prevent bullying

There is a strong whānau atmosphere, with the school having a strong commitment to whanaungatanga. Staff demonstrate positive and healthy relationships to students through valuing each other as individuals within a collective, respecting each other's positions and roles, utilising strengths and skills of all staff members, and celebrating the diverse lived experiences, values and beliefs of staff.

Students are deliberately centred in the school whānau and are welcomed and supported as individuals. Through sharing and learning of pūrākau and waiata, the students are supported to connect with their community, the environment, and their own whakapapa. The school also strives to embed whānau values that go beyond their school walls by nurturing strong relationships with the wider community.
School spaces are open and accessible to students and whānau and there is a big focus on facilitating meaningful relationships through the sharing of kai and kōrero. Kai is a large part of the school culture, with students always having something to eat while at school. A large veranda area located near the staffroom is used for students to sit with staff and have their lunch, and when whānau are present at the school they will join.

The service-focused leadership approach by the principal has been key to the school's success. Board members, staff, whānau and wider community members identified the principal as a key role model and inspiration for positive change. In the same spirit, the principal is adamant that the positive progress of the school stems from acknowledging and embracing the talent inherent in the staff and students. The principal has also worked with her staff to engage students and their whānau, guiding the school on a journey to develop their own tikanga and values.

What it means to feel "accepted, respected and connected"

Whanaungatanga with family, friends and peers.

When we asked students to describe what it means to feel accepted, respected and connected they told us about being supported by their family members, both locally and out-of-town. The students also emphasised the need to feel that they were helping their families, through doing chores for example. Students felt part of the bigger whānau in their school.

Students and staff and whānau conveyed that there is a strong sense of kotahitanga in the school. Whānau mentioned how the principal and staff welcomed them into the school and did extra to welcome new whānau in the community.

Participating in activities that let them be themselves.

The students valued having space to be themselves, play with each other, and do things they enjoy. Learning in creative ways, such as visiting spaces outside their school, helped them feel more connected to their environment and community. They told us that being involved in cultural activities, hearing Māori stories and waiata, and doing kapa haka let them be fully themselves. One student said:

> "Hakas - doing the challenges when we get to be hardout and just let go."

Students said sometimes they have to do things they don't want to do, such as going to school when they are tired or doing activities they are not interested in. However, they said staff are always supportive and fair, and clearly communicate the purpose of activities and why students need to participate.

When adults meaningfully acknowledge and support them

The students told us they want to be noticed by the adults in their lives, to have quality time and conversations, and that when this happens at home or in school they feel safe and supported. A student told us:

> "People listen to me and want to know what I think - cousins, aunties & uncles - whānau."

Staff role model positive behaviour and relationships

Staff told us that they must be responsible and accountable as role models, demonstrating positive behaviour and relationships between them for the students to see and learn from; to "Be the person you want them to be."

The staff expressed how the tumuaki works hard to look after them, and that her efforts to build strong connections within their team flows on to whānau and the community. The tumuaki told us that *"If my staff are feeling supported, they'll feel more comfortable, feel more part of the whānau."*

Being connected to their culture, to where they are, and their surroundings

Students told us that having their culture respected and being able to explore and understand their surroundings helps them to feel accepted, respected and connected. A child told us that learning more about and visiting wāhi tapu and places with historical significance to local iwi strengthens their relationships with their peers, with their community and with themselves.

Staff told us about how through ako they can teach the students about their local area. This is important because the school is grounded within local place: the community, iwi, the environment, the people, and the history. The school creates multiple opportunities for students to be out in their community and bring their culture and community into the school.

Ways students are made to feel accepted, respected and connected at this school

Whakawhanaungatanga through tuākana / tēina relationships, Kai and Kōrero

Students said that while things are not always perfect, they are happy to be at school because they are with the staff and their peers who feel like whānau. One child who shared that sometimes they feel bullied also told us that "this is possibly the best school" because when things are not so good he knows there are lots of people there to support him.

These relationships are fostered through a tuākana / tēina model where adults care for and role model to the students, and the older students care for and role model to the younger students.

One way the school prioritises relationships is through sharing of kai and facilitating meaningful kōrero as they eat. Students told us they enjoy "good food, when we get to have a good feed with the whānau and with the mates."

The students' whānau acknowledged the effort that the school invests in relationships which are key enablers of success. When describing how this is done with whānau, one adult said:

> ".... Here you can rock up as a māmā and you can sit down and eat your lunch with them and you are not told to leave straight away, you can have a kōrero with whoever is here, there is an openness that is not experienced in the city schools, and respectful relationships."

School leadership is accessible to students, staff, whānau and wider community

Students told us that the school leadership and staff are available when they need help. Whether it is during class, on the school grounds during break times, or after school time, students shared that they know they can contact and kōrero with the principal and staff when they need to.

Staff and whānau told us that leadership within the school has had a huge impact. They have introduced a whānau-centred focus that places the students and their whānau at the centre of the learning. Whānau members shared:

> "What I have seen and that I haven't seen in other schools, parents have value, they can come and chat with teachers. Parents have an opportunity to talk to anything that might be worrying them."

School leadership discussed the importance of being visible and available to help, but also trusting staff as leaders in their spaces. Adults told us there is strong support from the school leadership and staff for both students and whānau to value their identity.

Multiple methods and levels of support for the child, staff, and whānau

Staff have flexibility in class to allow them to build quality relationships with and between the students, and to adapt to the needs of individual students. Adults said:

> "The teachers here show more of a whānau relationship more than a teacher you listen to me... there is more respect from teacher to student if I was to make it more concise, there is more connection to the whenua which helps ground ourselves."

When individual students need support the school explores ways to provide it without diminishing the mana of the child. An example of this was given by a parent:

> "There is no embarrassment for parents if they don't have food. If one kid doesn't have a lunch the whole school gets a lunch so that one kid won't get singled out."

This demonstrates the intentional community and holistic approach of the school while addressing the individual needs of their students.

Tikanga instilled across the school, with input by students into values

Students told us that everyone at the school is treated as equals, and that there is a feeling of safety and fun within the school grounds. There is connection through tikanga, whakapapa and kaupapa at the school. The school has three core values, encouraging everyone to look after themselves, each other and their environment. Staff reinforce this by giving examples of how students can express each value or asking students how they could apply them with different people, or in different spaces.

Students had input into the school values, and there is a strong emphasis on student agency and valuing students' ideas within the school:

> "What gets in the way of school being a good place to be? "There's no money-we need to pay the bills of the whole school so we can do more things."

This was shared by a student who said they know about the challenges of the school because they are trusted to be involved.

Staff and whānau told us there is tikanga instilled across the school and a sense of collectivism, which means that no one feels left out. They echoed what we heard from the students, that they are connected by whakapapa and kaupapa at the school:

> "I been raised here since I was 2-3 years old, I have whakapapa here. It's pretty cool cause everybody is like one big family here, everyone is related."

Whakapapa is a vital aspect of tikanga, and it is celebrated as a strength throughout the school:

> "I believe it comes down to growing up together. Whakapapa connections. Most of them are connected through whakapapa."

Teachers setting expectations of behaviour for students, which helps to deter and respond to bullying

Students told us their teachers help them to learn important and difficult things. They feel that *"mistakes are the best"* because staff and their peers help them through it and to be better after it. Students explained that they have been encouraged to *"stop, listen and then respond"* to different situations, including bullying.

Staff and whānau felt that having positive adult role modelling deters bullying, and means when bullying does happen, students are supported to resolve issues themselves.

Positive behaviours included showing love and being kind

Students gave us examples of how they show love and respect to each other, by not shouting and being kind to each other. When asked how they learn to be kind they mentioned many different activities that happen in the school, including learning about tikanga, about God and Jesus and doing good, having school values, and talking about challenges with their teachers.

The school has done an incredibly good job of helping the students understand each other and each other's needs. We observed multiple times where students stepped in to help one of their peers who was having a hard time.

Students clearly empathised with their peers; for example, they explained that people sometimes come to school angry or sad because of things that might be happening at home or in the community. When students understand their peers' behaviour, they can respond positively and help that student get the support they need.

Staff and whānau told us they reward positive behaviour in many ways. This includes giving students extra responsibilities helping staff, treats such as ice-blocks and tasty food, and access to resources to do their own projects. However, rewarding positive behaviour is a bonus on top of the daily love and affection shown to all students.

Staff told us that every day every child should know they are important:

> "To make the kids feel good – it's about supporting the kids with their identity. It's making them feel proud that they're actually who they are – they're the ahi kā around here. They have a really important role holding the knowledge of (place). They're worth something."

How the school creates a safe and inclusive environment where students feel accepted, respected, and connected and where bullying is prevented and responded to

Great leadership enables kotahitanga in the school and community.

Leadership is seen as a responsibility as much as it is a privilege - a responsibility to serve others and be responsible for personal attitude and actions. Students told us that the tumuaki and staff, as well as members of the school board, show genuine interest in them and encourage them to be rangatira at school and at home:

> "We are reminded of our whakapapa and our potential - our roles in the school and why we should do better."

A common theme for staff and whānau we spoke with was the strong leadership provided to the school by the tumuaki. They told us that the tumuaki is supportive, approachable and receptive to all, and has intimate knowledge of each student and whānau. Trust is high and adults know that all information and views shared with the tumuaki are confidential, and that the tumuaki is fair and listens to anyone that needs to talk. The tumuaki's transparent and open communication, dealing with bullying quickly, and working with whānau, has made the school environment safe and inclusive.

Values that are known and practiced by everyone in a meaningful way.

Students and whānau helped develop values for the school, which are the foundation for growing relationships of aroha and respect. Students told us about learning about values through class lessons, school assemblies, conversations with teachers and their peers, and activities such as art, gardening and play.

Staff and whānau told us the three school values, which are expressed in te reo, are not just words but are a way of being. The school values reinforce having positive and healthy relationships within your own world, with each other, and the environment, which enhances the individual's mana and wellbeing. Staff emphasised that:

"It's really hard to say what you do exactly cos it's just the way we are. But I think kindness is a big thing. If you're kind you're gonna get kindness back."

Staff also told us about ways they instil the values in the students, such as being firm and consistent, using positive reinforcement when students self-manage and using restorative practice. They noted that the school uses a survey to find out what practices are working and to make adjustments. The strong partnership between the school and home means that the values are shared by students and whānau. The response to challenges is the same, and when there is a disconnect the path to restoration is rapid and smooth.

Bullying is dealt with promptly and everyone knows the process.

Students are clear on the process for responding to bullying and felt it was fair and has been well explained. They mentioned they are supported to resolve conflict or just reflect on how they're feeling in a range of ways, such as a dedicated reflection bench outside the staffroom.

This is a place that staff can send students to, and is also used by the students, who go there voluntarily or send their peers there if another student has breached tikanga:

".... when kids are being naughty or mean they have to go sit there, it's outside the staffroom." "teacher will tell you to go there or other kids" "other kids who help or stop fights will make you sit there." "you sit there and think, sometimes a teacher or another kid will come sit with you so you are not alone, but you do have to think."

The location of the seat is intentional. It is visible so that students can be monitored, but more importantly it is near the kitchen with the "good smells" and an opportunity to have kai and kōrero. This was seen by both adults and students as an effective tool in resolving conflict/restoring relationships and regulating behaviour.

Students are supported to have coping strategies in place to address their own and others' behaviours. This includes knowing trusted adults they can speak to, activities they can do to calm down, and spaces they can go to such as the garden and reflection bench to remove themselves.

"If things aren't good you can go sit in another class with them or sit out on the deck to calm down".

Students are also encouraged to remember compassion for both the person who experiences bullying, and the person who took part in the bullying, to restore kotahitanga.

There is tikanga around bullying which helps whānau to know the process and for students to sort it out themselves. This enables bullying to be dealt with quickly and for students to get support from the right people who can respond in culturally safe ways.

When bullying occurs, the students understand that it is wrong and that their whānau will be engaged if it is serious. Staff told us that mean, unkind behaviour is not tolerated, and they are the first to intervene to ensure everyone is safe as well, to demonstrate the seriousness of the issue.

"Consistency is huge. I wish I was firmer. I wish I was growlier than I am. I believe in being firm and consistent as much as possible and I think that makes a big difference."

Tikanga/ Kaupapa Māori is influential in maintaining values

Students and staff and whānau told us that the school has integrated karakia, whakataukī and pūrākau, wairuatanga and the history of local iwi and tīpuna into their teaching. The students that we spoke with told us about how they support each other through karakia and waiata, how stories about the whenua and their whakapapa foster a strong connection and belonging, and the energy of haka, dance, games and waiata was a source of pride and fun.

How the school involves whānau and the wider community

One big whānau – The school really cares

Students described the school as one big whānau. They also told us that there are a lot of whakapapa relationships within the school both between students and staff. This is acknowledged, harnessed, and built upon with students and staff actively sharing their stories.

"But round here you get involved in everyone's lives. Kids see all sides of you, you see all sides of kids."

Staff shared how every child belongs to every teacher and whānau. The tumuaki shared that this is a core part of the journey this school has been on to embrace every student, whānau, and the community around the whānau, so that aroha and ako occurs in tandem.

Whānau are visible and accessible inside and outside the school

Students said that their whānau are welcomed:

"The School is always open for our family, they come and join our class."

They also told us that whānau are involved in hui and conversations, and that students are actively engaged in school and community discussions:
"When our family come for meetings we come too and [the principal] talks to us."

Students told us that whānau often help at school, including preparing kai, supporting staff with class activities and spending time to do projects around the school.

Encouraging whānau to be involved requires proactivity and patience, but this leads to a meaningful partnership:

> "When we first started doing marau ā kura (local curriculum). Had to shoulder tap and bring parents in "oh we can't help you with that stuff". But a lot of times parents' understanding of school and their contributions are undervalued. But you should tap them, bring a few in that know each other. And have food. Once they come to the first one, a lot of them just feel comfortable to come back again. They knew they had a contribution to make. That was really cool to involve them in that rather than just the fundraising."

Staff and whānau told us however that being whakapapa whānau has advantages and disadvantages when issues arise. For example, because the community is small, people can't just ignore issues because they have to live with each other day to day.

Interconnected school and community

The community is an extension of the school. Students have talked about interacting with their local community to learn and share their learning, and staff continuously explore ways they can be physically present in the community so that whānau see them contributing to the community. School events are planned with whānau input, and the school is proactive about supporting community events and ensuring student voice is also heard there. This has led to greater community ownership of the school and community members showing interest and support:

> "Community spirit - even someone without kids came in and said, "can I help you?" you don't have to have kids here, you're still a part of the school community."

There is a reciprocal relationship between the school and whānau built on aroha and mana Staff and whānau described the relationship between school and whānau as being reciprocal. One staff member said:

> "In terms of the staff or the adults, I think that at the heart of it, my observations will be that the adults really care about the kids, like they know whatever their own lives might be I think at the heart of it they really care about these kids and love them."

This fosters a genuine and authentic relationship between the adults around the students.

Support needed to make students feel more accepted, respected, and connected at school

The need for improvements to the physical learning environment/resources

Students would like to see new/more computers and furniture in addition to better playground facilities, such as swings and a swimming pool. They would also like there to be more places to be alone, which can be difficult because there are few spaces that allow students to sit without being visible to others.

Staff and whānau also talked about the need for better resources. They said that these could include improvements to the physical learning environment including new computers and somewhere for students to play when it rained. Resources could also be used to enhance communication with whānau and community.

When asked what other schools could learn from their school, students mentioned their garden and how they grow their own food for school and for their whānau to eat.

More opportunities - Small, isolated town and small number of students

Students wanted there to be more opportunities for students at their school, including more kapa haka, swimming all year, more opportunities, and activities like this [speaking with our team] and trips for the school, such as to Rainbow's End. Some students told us that they wanted more opportunities to do things with other schools and the community.

Staff and whānau talked about wider systemic issues in the community, such as the need to end poverty. They would also like to see more funding for parenting courses and changes in the curriculum to see more New Zealand history reflected. Adults emphasised the importance of the school as a centre for all whānau in the community.

Staff would also like to see more support at school, including qualified full-time learning support staff onsite (not teacher aides) and administrative support for the principal.

The need for the education agencies to simplify processes and rethink priorities

Staff told us they would like the Ministry of Education to simplify the processes staff have to go through to access professional learning and development (PLD) opportunities, and to provide longer-term funding for supports. There are times that the amount of work required to access the support they need is a barrier as it cannot be done easily while fulfilling the daily priorities of the school.

Additionally, they would like the Ministry of Education and other education agencies, such as the Education Review Office, to rethink priorities and how they are set. They also talked about wanting the Ministry of Education to make te reo Māori compulsory and ensure there is cultural connectedness in schools more broadly.

"Work at making te reo compulsory in the schools. I know there's not enough Kaiako around, but if the reo's compulsory you need to find the Kaiako, you need to train the Kaiako. You're not allowed to go to training college if you don't have basic maths. Don't train them as teachers if they don't have basic reo either."

Staff and whānau also discussed the 'way' in which the Ministry of Education and other government agencies work with them. Feeling judged, marginalised and small has led to bad experiences and bad relationships making it difficult for the school to trust and collaborate with past visitors:

"Walking in yesterday and finding that you were all young and were all Indigenous it was like wow, we could relax, we were so stressed you know, it wasn't just another Ministry something to come and judge us, we have had some bad experiences, ERO doesn't get us...... the ministry has a lot of answer to."

The need for more staff training and access to outside providers

Though the school has amazing staff, limited personnel means that the intentional and intimate one-on-one support for students is limited. When there are issues it is difficult to be present with the student to really address what is upsetting them. Following an incident, one staff member told us:

"I could take time to be with (student) and help him calm down cos there were others around. But you don't always get that luxury" definitely a barrier."

They would like to see outside support for students' mental health, neurodiversity, brain development, and different ways of learning. As a small team of adults teaching and supporting students who cannot access services in the cities, the staff are not just educators, but frontline holistic wellbeing support.

Staff told us it is quite an effort for staff to attend training, and for providers to come to the school. They would like to see more support for teacher aides, digital tech learning, support with Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) initiatives, and training to understand neurodiversity and mental health, as they cannot access that support locally.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Methodology

This engagement sought to find out how we can foster safe and inclusive schools that prevent or reduce bullying from the perspectives of students and school communities. It focused on primary schools and kura kaupapa Māori.

It aimed to:

» identify and present elements of good practice that foster safe and inclusive school/kura environments that deter bullying, and

» understand the barriers and enablers in the schools/kura with a track record of safe and inclusive environments, and how barriers can be overcome, and enablers magnified.

To do this, we asked two research questions:

1. What are the elements of a positive, inclusive and safe school/kura environment from existing evidence (including enablers and barriers)?

2. What are the conditions and supports needed so that diverse students, school/kura and communities can work together to create positive, safe and inclusive environments for students to feel accepted, respected and connected, and prevent bullying?

Selecting the schools/kura

Schools/kura were selected based on how they modelled the elements of an inclusive, safe, positive school/kura environment. Schools and kura were identified based on either:

» recommendations by the New Zealand Centre for Educational Research (NZCER) of schools with positive trends in Wellbeing @ School survey findings

» being identified as engaged and effective at implementing PB4L (Positive Behaviour for Learning).

We created a short-list, ensuring there was a mix of school/kura sizes, locations, deciles, and Kura Kaupapa/immersion/English medium settings.

From this, five schools and kura (plus one in reserve) were identified. One of these was a Kura Kaupapa Māori to recognise the importance of ensuring the experiences of kura were represented, in addition to explicitly seeking the voice of Māori students in the primary schools.

Designing the engagements and selecting the participants

The Principals of each of these schools/kura were approached by one Ministry of Education or Office of the Children's Commissioner staff member, termed a "navigator", to determine the willingness of each school/kura to participate. Schools and kura put forward to the short list through NZCER (who analysed their Wellbeing@School survey results) had already consented to being invited to join this collaboration.

Recognising that the capacity and capability of each school/kura to participate in this project will be different, the project team sought to be flexible so that the engagement is suitable and appropriate. The school/kura was able to customise the activities and schedules to best suit their students, staff and school community. The principals of each school/kura worked with the navigator to create and co-decide the engagement for their school/kura, using a suite of engagement options offered to schools and kura by the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

The "co-decide" approach also ensured that any barriers that limited a student's participation were identified well in advance and resolved. The principal, with support of staff, invited adults, including board members, staff and whānau, and students to participate.

Ethics and informed consent

Our proposed approach for focus groups and interviews was submitted to an ethics committee comprised of members of both the Office of the Children's Commissioner and the Ministry of Education, as well as independent members with expertise in child and youth engagement. Our team was able to test thinking and identify and mitigate any potential risks to children.

Some considerations in the ethical approval process included:

» confirming that our informed assent and consent processes are appropriate for the children and young people taking part

» testing our engagement approaches

» agreeing on the appropriate koha for the school/kura

» confirming appropriate data storage and data sharing processes

» confirming confidentiality processes, including when to break confidentiality.

We developed clear guidelines for facilitators around ascertaining informed consent and ensuring that both students and adults understand what is happening. Further guidance on informed consent can be found on the Office of the Children's Commissioner website .

Working with the principals/tumuaki, each navigator also ascertained the school/kura policies relating to consent for external activities, and school/kura safety and child protection policies.

The project team worked with a school/kura representative to have a basic understanding of the school/kura culture and character, including learning about the whakapapa and history of the area, local pūrākau and to gain an understanding of the schools and kura tikanga and protocols.

Questions and activities were translated into te reo Māori, and discussions were facilitated by competent te reo Māori speakers, particularly for the kura kaupapa Māori engagement. This was led by the Kaitakawaenga Kaupapa Māori at the Office of the Children's Commissioner.

The engagement team was intentional in its application of pastoral care by providing time and space for support throughout the project design, as well as during the engagements, and post-engagement contact with the school/kura principals.

Recording what we heard

A consistent recording process throughout the project was essential to effectively and accurately record what we heard from the participants.

We designed recording templates directed at children and young people, staff, and whānau and community, to ensure participants' voices were captured accurately and recorded in a uniform way. The facilitators were required to fill out the recording template either during, or directly after, each engagement, which required data input such as:

» the details of the person(s) involved in the session

» verbatim quotes under each area of enquiry

» insights from the facilitator during the engagement, and how they drew those insights.

All information was recorded and stored securely and was not shared beyond the project team. All quotes were referenced in a way that ensured anonymity for the participants. Although the process was time-intensive for facilitators, it was necessary to ensure the original meaning of what the participants said was preserved.

The translation process was a "co-decide" approach; working with the schools and kura to identify key kupu, again particularly for the kura kaupapa Māori engagement. When participants spoke in te reo Māori, their answers were recorded in te reo Māori, and translated into English written word before being analysed so that other team members could gain a better understanding of the content during the analysis process. Quotations included in this report that were spoken in te reo Māori are presented in te reo Māori, with an English translation provided by a certified translator. The main report was also translated into te reo Māori by a certified reo Māori translator.

Analysing what we heard

The outputs from focus groups and interviews were considered first as part of a half-day thematic analysis hui for each school/kura, and then together at a one-day thematic analysis hui at the end of the week. The half-day analysis hui involved the teams who visited each school/kura, while the full-day hui involved the core project team and a small number of additional team members to provide a critical and outside perspective on the information and discussions.

The focus of the workshops was to:

» manually code the recording templates

» identify key themes and come to a consensus on overarching themes arising from the focus groups and interviews within each school/kura, and

» identify commonalities across schools/kura.

Appendix 2: Glossary and key terms

The explanations below are provided to support readers of this report and not intended to be interpreted as definitions.

Te reo Māori kupu:

Āhua – appearance

Ako – to learn

Akomanga – learning class or facility

Ākonga – student or learner

Iwi - strength, bone and the extended kinship group, the tribe

Kāhui ako - community of learning group

Kaiako – teacher or facilitator

Kaimahi – worker or employee

Kaitakawaenga Kaupapa Māori – a role established as part of the project team to ensure tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and te reo Māori guided the engagement approach

Kaitiakitanga – guardianship

Kapa haka – a group to dance, perform the haka or Māori performing arts

Karakia – prayer, recite ritual chant

Kāri wātea – calming cards

Kaumātua – an elder or person with status and knowledge within the whānau, hapū and iwi

Kaupapa Māori - Māori approach, Māori ideologies and philosophies, Māori skills, attitudes and values of Māori society

Kete cards – cards used as a behaviour management process

Kōrero – oral communication or speaking

Kotahitanga – unity

Kura – we have used kura in this report as short term for kura kaupapa Māori

Kura kaupapa Māori – school or learning institute or Māori medium education

Māmā - mother, birth mother

Manaakitanga – support, kindness, generosity, hospitality

Marae - the open area in front of the wharenui, traditional meeting places for Māori

Marau ā kura – Local school curriculum

Mātauranga Māori – traditional Māori knowledge, Māori epistemology

Mau rākau – Māori martial arts

Moemoeā – dreams and aspirations

Mōteatea – traditional Māori song or chant

Ngākau Māori – a person or way that has Māori values at heart

Pono – to be true

Pūrākau – storytelling or local stories, myths and legends

Rangatira - high ranking, chiefly, noble, esteemed leader

Raru – issues or problems

Reo rua – bilingual learning

Rūma rumaki reo – a room fully immersed in the Māori language

Rumaki – room or class

Tamaiti – child

Tangata - people

Tauira – student or learner

Tikanga Māori – Māori customs and traditions

Tīpuna – ancestor

Tuākana Tēina – is a Māori concept referring to the relationship between an older sibling (Tuākana) and a younger sibling (Tēina). Also used in the context as a relationship model in learning

Tumuaki – principal or headmaster

Waiata – song or to sing

Wairuatanga – spirituality

Wānanga – seminar, conference, forum

Whakapapa – genealogy

Whakataukī – proverbs or significant sayings

Whānau – family of the student or wider school community

Whakairo - carving

Whakawhanaungatanga – process of establishing relationships, relating well to others.

Whanaunatanga - relationship, kinship, sense of family connection

Wharekura – secondary school run on kaupapa Māori principles and taught in the Māori language

Whare tūpuna – ancestral house

Whenua - land