

# Submission to the Ministry of Education on the proposal to replace NCEA

## Introducing Mana Mokopuna – Children's Commissioner

Mana Mokopuna – Children's Commissioner is the independent Crown entity with the statutory responsibility to advocate for the rights, interests, participation and well-being of mokopuna<sup>1</sup> (all children and young people) under 18 years old in Aotearoa New Zealand, including young persons aged over 18 but under 25 years of age if they are, or have been, in care or custody. The Children's Commissioner is Dr Claire Achmad.

We independently advocate for and with mokopuna within the context of their families, whānau, hapū, iwi and communities, based on evidence, data and research, including the perspectives of mokopuna.

Our work is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention), Te Tiriti o Waitangi and other international human rights instruments. We are a National Preventative Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, meaning we monitor places where mokopuna are deprived of their liberty, including in the care and protection, youth justice, youth mental health and intellectual disability spaces.

We have a statutory mandate to promote the Children's Convention and monitor the Government's implementation of its duties under the Convention, and to work in ways that uphold the rights of mokopuna Māori including under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We place a focus on advocating for and with mokopuna who are experiencing disadvantage, and we recognise and celebrate the diversity of mokopuna in all its forms.

Our moemoeā (vision) is *Kia kuru pounamu te rongō – All mokopuna live their best lives*, which we see as a collective vision and challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand.

## Summary and recommendations

“Proceed [with the NCEA changes] with caution. If you look back to two years ago when the [NCEA] Level 1 system was changed, it was an appalling job in retrospect.”

(Year 12 at Rutherford College, Deputy head boy, Isaac Lee via Re: News)<sup>2</sup>

1. Our overarching position on the proposal to replace NCEA is that first and foremost, the education system exists to serve mokopuna – children and young people – and therefore it is them who should be the primary people whose experiences and views

<sup>1</sup> At Mana Mokopuna we have adopted the term 'mokopuna' to describe all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. 'Mokopuna' brings together 'moko' (imprint or tattoo) and 'puna' (spring of water). Mokopuna describes that we are descendants, and or grandchildren, and how we need to think across generations for a better present and future. We acknowledge the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflect that in all we do. Referring to children and young people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from, matters for their identity, belonging and well-being at every stage of their lives.

<sup>2</sup> [Teens tell us about the NCEA 'game' almost anyone can win | TVNZ+](#)



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inform this consultation. To this end, Mana Mokopuna developed information to support mokopuna to have their say as part of this consultation.<sup>3</sup> Much more work must be done to hear the views of mokopuna and ensure their voices shape the changes to NCEA and all other decisions that impact their schooling and education.

2. This summary outlines our position on the substantive nature of the proposals, grounded in our work over many years with mokopuna in relation to the education system and their right to education as established under Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Children’s Convention).
3. Education reform, including changes to NCEA, must be grounded in a rights-based approach that recognises the voices of mokopuna and ensures their active participation in shaping policy and practice. Mana Mokopuna continues to call for an education system that upholds equity, cultural identity, and holistic development for all ākonga. It is essential these changes recognise all learning pathways – vocational, practical, creative, and community-based – as high-quality, legitimate options that reflect the strengths and aspirations of all ākonga. Across many engagements spanning over a number of years, mokopuna throughout Aotearoa New Zealand have told their Children’s Commissioner that this is what is needed.<sup>4</sup>
4. We are concerned the proposed changes will exclude ākonga who learn differently, limit options for those seeking vocational qualifications, and increase the risk of learners being diverted into alternative education rather than supported in mainstream settings.<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Education must consider the impacts on different cohorts of ākonga and the different education pathways or scenarios that will or will no longer exist for them, as currently, this information is not clear.
5. While there have been limited opportunities for ākonga to formally express their perspectives, some have shared their views ranging from concerns about the proposed changes, about the current system, and about how the changes to NCEA may devalue their qualifications. Mokopuna have also emphasised the need for purposeful and inclusive engagement with them to ensure the changes work for them. Since the proposal was announced, the Children’s Commissioner has heard directly from mokopuna in communities across the country who are worried about the scale of the changes, the uncertainty these create, and their disappointment at not being consulted before the proposal was made public. While some mokopuna have acknowledged that NCEA is not always working well, many fear that the positive aspects of the system will be lost. They have been clear that any reform must ensure the education system works for all mokopuna, whatever their learning needs. As one mokopuna put it: *“This is huge – it’s our education, it’s our lives. We should be involved in these changes.”*
6. Current timeframes for the change and uncertainty about how it will play out are placing undue stress on many ākonga, teachers, schools, and boards. While the intention of NCEA reforms is to improve education outcomes, rapid changes to NCEA risks deepening systemic inequities, particularly for Māori, Pacific, disabled, rainbow, care-experienced

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<sup>3</sup> See: [Changes to NCEA need your say | Mana Mokopuna](#)

<sup>4</sup> For example, please see [Education matters to me: Key Insights | Mana Mokopuna](#)

<sup>5</sup> There is great value in alternative education for some mokopuna. However, as noted in this report ‘[An Alternative Education? Support for our most disengaged young people](#)’ by the Education Review Office, the current environment is under-resourced and struggling to deliver positive outcomes. We are concerned that mokopuna who do not require alternative education may be diverted into this pathway, where their needs are unlikely to be met, and their educational achievement may be further compromised.

and rural learners. Time, care and holistic approaches must be taken to ensure these reforms work for all learners.

7. Reforms must go beyond equality to achieve equity, dismantling historic and ongoing barriers by delivering education that is inclusive, empowering, and relevant for all mokopuna. Given the impact of the proposal on mokopuna Māori, these reforms must align with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Article 30 of the Children's Convention, respecting and promoting te reo, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori.
8. Mana Mokopuna is available to support the Ministry of Education with embedding mokopuna participation into the NCEA reforms and to provide children's rights-based advice.

## Recommendations

9. Mana Mokopuna – Children's Commissioner makes the following recommendations to the Ministry of Education in relation to the proposal to replace NCEA:

### **Apply a children's rights approach to any changes and ensure mokopuna participation**

- Ensure ākonga voice is central to educational decision-making.
- Recognise education as a tool for empowerment, identity, and participation, not just academic achievement.
- Ensure wellbeing, identity, and holistic approaches are prioritised in the reforms.
- Establish independent evaluation and review mechanisms with mokopuna voice.

### **Uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the rights of mokopuna Māori**

- Uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi, support Māori leadership in education reform, and embed mātauranga Māori, te reo Māori, and tikanga in NCEA changes.
- Enable hapū, iwi, whānau and mokopuna Māori to exercise tino rangatiratanga over their learning journeys through culturally grounded pathways.

### **Design a truly equitable system and ensure support for all learners**

- Address systemic inequities for Māori, Pacific, disabled, rainbow, and rural ākonga.
- Support flexible assessment options and ensure updated literacy and numeracy assessment standards are not a barrier to success for mokopuna.
- Provide equitable resourcing and sustained professional development for teachers.

### **Value all education pathways and prevent exclusion**

- Treat vocational, creative, and practical education as equal to other subjects.
- Ensure education supports all ākonga to remain in mainstream schooling and avoid over-reliance on alternative education placements.
- Work with employers, universities, and tertiary providers to ensure qualifications are widely recognised and trusted.

### **Revisit the timeframes and communications to ensure they work for those impacted**

- Extend NCEA change timelines and adopt phased rollouts or pilot programmes.
- Resource and train educators properly before full changes are introduced.

- Improve communication regarding NCEA changes through accessible, whānau- and ākonga-friendly engagement channels.
- Clearly explain how the proposed changes will affect different cohorts of ākonga and the pathways that will remain available or be removed.

## Introduction

“I still care very much about the changes because my little sister will go through it, a lot of my friends will go through it and they deserve a really good quality education.” (Brynn Pierce, Year 12 via New Zealand Herald)<sup>6</sup>

10. Mana Mokopuna – Children’s Commissioner advocates for an education system that is equitable, culturally grounded, and centred on the rights and wellbeing of all ākonga. While NCEA reforms aim to raise standards and improve outcomes, the speed of consultation and implementation, inadequate resourcing in schools and lack of mokopuna voice risks creating further inequities and stress for learners, whānau, teachers, and schools.
11. In line with the Children’s Convention and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, educational policy must be holistic and reflect the diverse cultural realities of Aotearoa New Zealand. Education is not only about academic achievement but also about nurturing identity, belonging, creativity, and participation.
12. Any educational reform should empower all ākonga to learn to their fullest potential, especially those who already experience disadvantage such as Māori, Pacific, disabled, neurodiverse, care-experienced mokopuna or those living in remote or rural communities by offering meaningful choice, adaptability, and support. To achieve this, reforms need to be introduced thoughtfully, with clear communication, proper resourcing, and opportunities for mokopuna to input.

## The right to education and alignment with the Children’s Convention

“I really enjoyed it [NCEA]. It’s been great because I’ve been able to upskill and do extra things on top of my usual classes. [...] I’ve done some extra qualifications through Gateway and St John.”

(Albany Senior High School Student, via Stuff)<sup>7</sup>

13. As a duty bearer under the Children’s Convention, the Ministry of Education holds clear responsibilities to ensure that the rights of mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand are respected, protected, and fulfilled.
14. Under Articles 28 and 29 of the Children’s Convention, all mokopuna have the right to education. This includes the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.<sup>8,9</sup>
15. The proposed reforms must be assessed against Article 28, which affirms every child’s right to education on the basis of equal opportunity. This includes ensuring access to

<sup>6</sup> NCEA overhaul: Wellington student supports changing ‘flawed’ education system - NZ Herald

<sup>7</sup> ‘I do feel negated’: Students react to the scrapping of NCEA | Stuff

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child#Article-28>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child#Article-29>

both general and vocational pathways, providing financial or learning support where needed, and taking steps to reduce barriers that may lead to disengagement. Any changes to NCEA must therefore expand, not limit, opportunities for mokopuna to succeed in different forms of education (including vocational).<sup>10</sup>

16. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN Committee) has provided guidance on implementing a rights-based approach to education. General Comment No. 1 on Article 29: The Aims of Education, stresses that education must promote the holistic development of the child. It should nurture creativity, critical thinking, emotional wellbeing, and the capacity of mokopuna to participate fully in society.<sup>11</sup>
17. The Ministry of Education must consider all rights under the Children’s Convention alongside Articles 28 and 29, including equity, participation, and non-discrimination. Mana Mokopuna wishes to highlight the following rights as particularly important in guiding reforms to ensure all mokopuna are supported to learn, succeed, and thrive:
  - **Article 2 - Non-discrimination:** Tamariki Māori and all mokopuna must have equal access to quality education, with reforms addressing historic and systemic inequities.
  - **Article 3 - Best interests of the child:** All decisions about education reforms must put the best interests of mokopuna at the centre.
  - **Article 12 - Right to be heard:** Ākonga must be meaningfully involved in shaping how reforms are designed and implemented. For more information on Article 12, please refer to the next section on page 6.
  - **Article 17 - Access to information:** Mokopuna have the right to clear, accessible information that supports their learning and wellbeing, including about changes that affect them.
  - **Article 23 - Rights of children with disabilities:** Reforms must ensure inclusive education that meets diverse needs without exclusion.
  - **Article 30 - Right to culture, language, and identity:** Diverse mokopuna, particularly mokopuna Māori, and mokopuna who are Pacific or from other ethnic communities, have the right to education that affirms their culture, language, and identity.
18. Reforms of Aotearoa New Zealand’s education system must retain a holistic view of education. A children’s rights approach to education requires a comprehensive focus on the whole development of the child, which includes, but is not limited to academic achievement alone. This approach requires mokopuna involvement and participation in decisions about their learning – both in their local schools and at the national level.<sup>12</sup>
19. The rights outlined above highlight the importance of ensuring that any educational reforms – including NCEA – move beyond narrow standards to create an inclusive, rights-based system. Such a system would value wellbeing, identity, and belonging alongside achievement, ensuring every ākonga is supported to reach their fullest potential.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child#Article-28>

<sup>11</sup> [General comment No. 1 \(2001\), Article 29 \(1\), The aims of education | Refworld](#)

<sup>12</sup> This was evidenced by our work with the Youth Voices Group (YVG), who shared their experiences of being underserved by the education system and called for an education where every ākonga feels a sense of belonging and can thrive. They emphasised the need for stronger participatory rights, ensuring that all mokopuna have a voice in decisions about their education and in shaping their own learning. To hear more from the YVG, please refer here: <https://vimeo.com/987843589>

## The voices of mokopuna and their right to participation



"I feel like as rangatahi (youth) decisions are often made for us, rather than with us. And yes, everybody can say that once upon a time you were a youth. But you're not living as a youth today and it changes for everybody. I kind of wish that we were bought into the process a bit more."  
(Kapiti College Head of Kura, Aroa Al Masri, via RNZ)<sup>13</sup>

20. Article 12 of the Children's Convention establishes the fundamental right for children that they have the right to have a say in decisions that impact them. Some mokopuna have made it clear that this kaupapa is of great importance to them, sharing their concerns about the impact the proposed NCEA changes will have on their qualifications in the future, as well as those of their peers, siblings and wider whānau.<sup>14</sup>
21. There is a great diversity of views on the changes to NCEA, with some mokopuna in support of removing NCEA and others concerned about the changes as they are nervous about increasing education inequities, lack of flexibility and the worth of their NCEA qualifications.<sup>15</sup>
22. In conversation with many mokopuna in their communities across the country, the Children's Commissioner has heard concerns about the magnitude of the change, the uncertainty they are feeling, and their disappointment that they were not consulted before the proposal was made public. While some mokopuna shared that NCEA does not always work well, they expressed strong concern that the good parts of NCEA will be lost in the changes. The Children's Commissioner also continues to hear strong views from mokopuna that the education system needs to work for all ākonga no matter what their learning needs are.
23. Many mokopuna have shared that the NCEA change consultation process was not accessible to them.<sup>16</sup> We urge the Ministry of Education to establish consultation processes that enable mokopuna to participate and provide valuable feedback to ensure that ākonga lived experience is reflected in the NCEA change process.
24. The views of mokopuna on the proposed changes to NCEA are invaluable. With lessons to learn across the range of positive and negative experiences. Evidence shows that mokopuna participation in decision-making at school is linked with greater engagement in education. For example, mokopuna have significantly higher perceived rates of academic achievement, higher life satisfaction and are more likely to enjoy school.<sup>17</sup>
25. Our insights are informed by ākonga voice in the media, social media discourse and informal communications with mokopuna – who all have differing views based on their lived experience. If the Ministry of Education would like to ensure that mokopuna throughout the country have a comprehensive and meaningful opportunity to share their views to inform and shape these changes, Mana Mokopuna is available to provide support on best practice mokopuna participation and engagement.

<sup>13</sup> [NCEA Changes: A student's perspective | RNZ](#)

<sup>14</sup> [13-year-old Henry Blakeman interviews David Seymour on the Dom Harvey Podcast](#)

<sup>15</sup> [NCEA is being scrapped and you have thoughts: 'A to E is better' ... 'sad for kids who don't do well in exams' ... '19th century' | Stuff](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Teens tell us about the NCEA 'game' almost anyone can win | TVNZ+](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Müller-Kuhn, Daniela, et al. 2023. "Student participation in everyday school life—Linking different perspectives."](#)



[My hopes are] that we actually try to explain thoroughly to children that they have a say in the spaces that they're learning in."

(Mokopuna from the Youth Voices Group, Wānanga with Mana Mokopuna, 2023)<sup>18</sup>

## Timeframes and pressures on the education community



I think switching this system is just going to confuse student and teachers more. The NCEA system in place works for all of my other classmates and teachers, so I don't see a need to change it? It's fine as is, switching it is just going to make students more stressed and confused about how school works."

(Year 11 Student via Stuff August 2025)<sup>19</sup>

26. One of the key concerns that the education community has raised about the changes to NCEA is the compounding pressures on ākonga, teachers and schools and the timeframes proposed for implementation.<sup>20</sup> Both ākonga and school staff have expressed concern that the new qualifications could face similar challenges to those experienced with the changes to NCEA Level 1.<sup>21,22</sup>
27. Many ākonga have told the Children's Commissioner in direct conversations with her over the past few months that the impact of the changes to NCEA Level 1 have been very stressful for them, and detrimental to their educational journey. These ākonga have overwhelmingly expressed concern to the Children's Commissioner about how the proposed replacement of NCEA will impact on the remainder of their secondary education and their future prospects.
28. Education experts including kura kaupapa leaders are concerned that mokopuna will experience increased stress due to inadequate time to adapt to changes, inflexibility, along with the proposed high-stakes literacy/numeracy assessments.<sup>23,24</sup>
29. Mana Mokopuna also wishes to raise concerns about the resourcing restraints experienced by Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura) and the alternative education system, which has been highlighted as needing significant additional support by the Education Review Office (ERO).<sup>25,26</sup>
30. Many teachers are frustrated with the lack of support to adapt to the new curriculum, education standards and policy/legislative changes.<sup>27</sup> Educators across the motu have emphasised that because the curriculum refresh is not complete, NCEA reforms will likely result in further confusion and complications for teachers.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Youth Voices Group Wānanga - December 2023 on Vimeo

<sup>19</sup> NCEA is being scrapped and you have thoughts: 'A to E is better' ... 'sad for kids who don't do well in exams' | Stuff

<sup>20</sup> 'Pause NCEA consultation' – principal's plea - Newsroom

<sup>21</sup> Teens tell us about the NCEA 'game' almost anyone can win | TVNZ+

<sup>22</sup> NCEA overhaul sparks optimism and concern | RNZ News

<sup>23</sup> Whanganui educators voice concerns over NCEA overhaul - NZ Herald

<sup>24</sup> Cautious optimism from kura Māori amid NCEA reform – Te Ao Māori News

<sup>25</sup> Education Review Office, Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu Education Review Report 5 November 2021.pdf

<sup>26</sup> An Alternative Education? Support for our most disengaged young people | Education Review Office

<sup>27</sup> NZEI Te Riu Roa, Survey, 2024. Retrieved from: Curriculum change too fast to be effective, say teachers and...

<sup>28</sup> 'Reckless and unachievable': A tired teacher critiques the proposed NCEA overhaul | The Spinoff

31. Teachers and schools must be given adequate time, resources, and professional development to implement new standards effectively, to ensure changes are sustainable and beneficial for all learners.

## The education system must support equitable outcomes

“It [changes to NCEA] feels like taking a big step back for those who are neurodiverse and those who struggle to learn. It's a little bit scary in a way.”  
(Kapiti College Head of Kura, Aroa Al Masri, via RNZ)<sup>29</sup>

32. Persistent gaps in achievement for mokopuna Māori, Pacific, whaikaha (disabled), neurodiverse, care-experienced mokopuna and those from low socio-economic backgrounds show that our education system is not yet delivering equitable outcomes.<sup>30</sup> Any reforms must therefore be designed to dismantle systemic barriers, rather than risk reinforcing existing inequities. Without targeted action and consideration, those already disadvantaged will continue to be left behind or be left farther behind.
33. High-pressure literacy and numeracy requirements risk undermining equity by excluding mokopuna who learn differently or need more time and support to succeed. A one-size-fits-all approach does not reflect the diversity of learners in Aotearoa New Zealand and may disadvantage ākonga who need flexible, inclusive pathways.<sup>31</sup>
34. In 2024, Pacific mokopuna had the lowest attainment rate of NCEA Level 1 of 54.6%.<sup>32</sup> The Action Plan for Pacific Education has also acknowledged that many Pacific ākonga are not benefiting from their education environments/learning experiences.<sup>33</sup> Mana Mokopuna is concerned that the proposed changes will not value the diverse cultural strengths, learning styles, and languages of Pacific learners. Without intentional inclusion of Pacific perspectives, these reforms risk reinforcing existing inequities and limiting opportunities for Pacific mokopuna to succeed and thrive.<sup>34</sup>
35. Both non-disabled mokopuna and mokopuna whaikaha have shared that the changes to NCEA could set back progress for learners who require different supports or approaches to succeed.<sup>35,36</sup> Mokopuna whaikaha already experience a multitude of barriers to inclusive education.<sup>37</sup> If the changes lead to reduced flexibility as planned, mokopuna whaikaha risk being further disadvantaged in the education system, increasing the number of barriers to their education.<sup>38</sup> Disabled mokopuna involved with Oranga Tamariki achieve NCEA Level 2 or higher at much lower rates – around 20% – compared with 57% of other care-experienced young people, highlighting the need for an intersectional lens and targeted support for mokopuna whaikaha.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>29</sup> [NCEA Changes: A student's perspective | RNZ](#)

<sup>30</sup> [Ministry of Education: Promoting equitable educational outcomes](#)

<sup>31</sup> He Whakaaraara, A Call to Action. October 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.hewhakaaraara.nz/report>

<sup>32</sup> [2024-Annual-Report-on-NCEA-New-Zealand-Scholarship-Data-and-Statistics.pdf](#)

<sup>33</sup> [Action-Plan-for-Pacific-Education-2023\\_070723\\_\(1\).pdf](#)

<sup>34</sup> [Is the end of NCEA a step forward or a step backward for Pasifika? | RNZ News](#)

<sup>35</sup> [NCEA Changes: A student's perspective | RNZ](#)

<sup>36</sup> [‘I do feel negated’: Student’s react to the scrapping of NCEA | Stuff](#)

<sup>37</sup> [thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools.pdf](#)

<sup>38</sup> [Ministry of Education - Discussion document: Proposal to replace NCEA with new national qualifications Priority 3: Smarter Assessment and Reporting AUGUST 2025](#)

<sup>39</sup> [The education experiences and needs of children and young people in care or youth justice](#)

36. As noted throughout the submission, we are also concerned that the proposed changes may lead to further inequities for mokopuna Māori. It is therefore essential that intersectionality is considered in these changes – particularly for mokopuna Māori and diverse mokopuna with intersecting identities, such as those who are whaikaha, part of the rainbow community, or living in rural and/or low socioeconomic areas.<sup>40,41</sup>
37. Mokopuna with care-experience or in youth justice must be a key consideration when assessing the proposed NCEA changes. An intersectional approach is essential, as around 71% of mokopuna in care identify as Māori or Pacific, and mokopuna whaikaha are also overrepresented in the Oranga Tamariki system.<sup>42</sup> These mokopuna often experience high levels of mental health and wellbeing needs, and face barriers to accessing appropriate education and support services due to limited coordination, insufficient capacity, and a lack of tailored support.<sup>43</sup> Alongside the NCEA reforms, the Ministry of Education must place priority on improving cross-agency collaboration across education, health, and social services, so that care-experienced mokopuna have all they need to succeed academically, engage fully in their learning, and achieve positive social and emotional outcomes.<sup>44</sup>
38. We also urge the Ministry of Education to consider the approximate 30,000 distance learners who are ākonga at Te Kura.<sup>45</sup> ERO has noted rising enrolments of disengaged ākonga, many of whom are Māori.<sup>46</sup> While Te Kura provides strong support, these learners would benefit from better resourcing, wrap-around services, and stronger system-wide collaboration to fully support their learning.<sup>47</sup> In 2024, Te Kura had a high NCEA standard achievement rate and 42% of their ākonga were in years 11-13.<sup>48,49</sup> With this in mind, Te Kura must be supported to ensure the distance learners, particularly disengaged ākonga, are equipped to succeed under the reforms.
39. Reforms must recognise the value of all learning pathways. Vocational, practical, creative, and community-based learning pathways are as valuable as traditional academic options.<sup>50,51,52</sup> They must be recognised as high-quality and legitimate components of the curriculum to ensure that every ākonga sees their strengths and aspirations reflected in the system. Ākonga frequently raise with the Children’s Commissioner the value of vocational, practical, creative and community-based learning pathways, and the positive impact that these are having for them in strengthening their education and empowering them with clear career aspirations and pathways for their futures.
40. The new standards could push mokopuna into alternative education if schools are not appropriately resourced to support all learners to succeed. This will place more pressure on providers who are already working in a strained and under-resourced environment.

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<sup>40</sup> [Intersectionality in education | OECD](#)

<sup>41</sup> He Whakaaraara, A Call to Action. October 2024. Retrieved from: <https://www.hewhakaaraara.nz/report>

<sup>42</sup> [The education experiences and needs of children and young people in care or youth justice](#)

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu, [Annual-Report-2024.pdf](#)

<sup>46</sup> Education Review Office - [Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu Education Review Report 5 November 2021.pdf](#)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu, [Annual-Report-2024.pdf](#)

<sup>49</sup> ERO noted that in 2021 more than 70 percent of its full-time students have been referred by Oranga Tamariki, Department of Corrections and the Ministry of Education. Te Kura is also an important access point for over 400 geographically isolated ākonga. Retrieved from: [Te Aho o te Kura Pounamu Education Review Report 5 November 2021.pdf](#)

<sup>50</sup> [Innovation in career pathways across five countries \(EN\)](#)

<sup>51</sup> [A whole-of-rural-community approach to supporting education and career pathway choice](#)

<sup>52</sup> Education Review Office, International Evidence Toolkit on [Arts participation](#). July 2021.

## Upholding the rights of mokopuna Māori

“Help us learn about our culture, about our language, give our land back, support our family.” (Mokopuna Māori, aged 14-16, Remand Home)<sup>53</sup>

41. The Crown has a duty under Te Tiriti o Waitangi to govern fairly and transparently, whilst ensuring tino rangatiratanga for tangata whenua. NCEA reforms must engage tangata whenua at every stage and uphold the provisions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Article 30 of the Children’s Convention.<sup>54</sup> Both rights instruments affirm the rights of mokopuna Māori to their language, culture, and identity.
42. Tangata whenua have the right to self-determination, as outlined in Article 2 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi - this includes the right to access Māori-led and culturally grounded education pathways. NCEA reforms must ensure kaupapa Māori pathways and Māori-led education initiatives such as kura kaupapa and wānanga are able to shape their own teaching and qualification standards. Mana Mokopuna notes that there is an intent to work with Māori as proposed in the consultation documents, and we urge the Ministry of Education to await making any decisions until adequate engagement with Māori occurs.
43. Education reforms must address discrimination and both historic and ongoing inequities.<sup>55</sup> Standardised literacy and numeracy assessments can disadvantage mokopuna Māori when they fail to reflect Māori ways of knowing and learning.<sup>56</sup> True equity means resourcing schools and kura to respond flexibly to the diverse strengths and needs of mokopuna Māori. Reforms must aim for true equity — not just treated equally — by recognising and responding to the specific needs, strengths, and contexts of mokopuna Māori.
44. Education must nurture the whole child, including cultural, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing. NCEA reforms should embed te reo Māori, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori as central, not optional, so mokopuna Māori can learn in ways that affirm and support their identity and connection to culture.

## Conclusion

“I personally find it alright, but I know a lot of my friends are struggling. The system definitely needs change, and it’s great to have someone [the Spinoff] actually care about our opinions for once.

(NCEA Level 2 Student via the Spinoff July 2025)<sup>57</sup>

45. NCEA reforms must go beyond academic achievement to create an education system that is equitable, inclusive, and rights-based. This means recognising the diverse needs, strengths, and aspirations of all ākonga, including Māori, Pacific, disabled, rainbow, and rural learners, and ensuring that every ākonga has access to meaningful, culturally grounded pathways.

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<sup>53</sup> Mana Mokopuna - Without racism Aotearoa would be better Digital.pdf

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child#Article-30>

<sup>55</sup> <https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/10289/15290/4/thesis.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> <https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/entities/publication/a971bd9a-bbcf-4de1-a88f-3deb31e6fb42>

<sup>57</sup> ‘So many issues’ but ‘alright, I guess’: What students actually think of NCEA | The Spinoff

46. Schools and teachers must be provided with adequate time, resources, and support to implement changes effectively, without increasing pressure or widening existing inequities.
47. For mokopuna Māori, upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the rights outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is essential. Education must respect and promote te reo Māori, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori, and empower tangata whenua to shape their own learning journeys. By embedding these principles, NCEA reforms can support wellbeing, identity, and holistic development alongside academic achievement, ensuring that every ākonga is able to reach their fullest potential and thrive in a system that genuinely values them.