

# Education Review Report

## Whatawhata School

The purpose of ERO's reviews is to give parents and the wider school community assurance about the quality of education that schools provide and their children receive. An ERO school report answers the question "How effectively is this school's curriculum promoting student learning - engagement, progress and achievement?" Under that overarching question ERO reports on the quality of education and learning outcomes for children and for specific groups of children including Māori students, Pacific students and students with special needs. ERO also reports on the quality of the school's systems for sustaining and continuing improvements.

## Findings

### 1 Context

#### What are the important features of this school that have an impact on student learning?

Whatawhata School is located in a rapidly growing, semi-rural area 10 kilometres west of Hamilton. The school caters for students in Years 1 to 8 who come from diverse backgrounds. There are now 144 students on the school roll and this represents a 50% increase since the previous ERO review in 2011. Just over one quarter of the students identify as Māori and many come from the local area.

In Term 4 2011, a new principal was appointed and a new board elected in 2013. The school leadership team has been re-structured to include the deputy principal, who is the senior team leader, and a newly appointed junior team leader. Ongoing property developments, including information and computer technologies (ICT) upgrades, have been undertaken to enhance the curriculum and cater for roll growth.

The school has responded positively to the areas for review and development in the previous ERO report. Teachers have been focused on professional learning and development in reading and are currently exploring new strategies to raise achievement in writing. The school's strategic plan clearly sets out educational aims and goals that are closely aligned to *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC).

Students learn and play in a safe, friendly, family-orientated school environment. The school's traditional vision of *kia whakatupu* – to grow, *kia whakatutukitanga* – to achieve, and *kia manaaki* – to care, has been revised and is now widely known and promoted.

### 2 Learning

#### How well does this school use achievement information to make positive changes to learners' engagement, progress and achievement?

There is a planned approach to assessment in reading, writing and mathematics. The principal and teachers continue to revise the use of assessment tools and recognise the importance of assessment across all the strands in mathematics. Teachers use moderation processes to make overall teacher judgements in relation to National Standards. This information is analysed and reported to the board and parents. The board uses the information to prioritise charter goals, make decisions about resourcing, and plan for school development and improvement. Parents receive twice yearly reports

in relation to National Standards. They also receive reports from the principal about school-wide progress. Parents are invited to attend conferences with teachers to discuss their child's learning.

School leaders work with teachers to develop learner action plans that include comprehensive National Standards information identifying priority learners who are below and well below the standards. Teachers work with teacher aides to provide programmes of learning to help accelerate the progress of priority learners.

The school's National Standards achievement information, reported to the board in 2013, shows that the overall school-wide student achievement information in reading and writing is similar to national comparisons. It also shows that there are disparities between Māori and non-Māori students. However, the principal reports that in reading, strong teacher focus on priority learners has brought a positive shift in closing this gap. Teachers are maintaining this focus on priority learners and closely monitoring their progress and achievement.

An agreed next step is for teachers to consistently use diagnostic assessment information to plan and implement deliberate acts of teaching that will accelerate the learning for priority students and further challenge other students.

### **3 Curriculum**

#### **How effectively does this school's curriculum promote and support student learning?**

The Whatawhata School curriculum effectively promotes and supports student learning. There is a strong focus on reading, writing and mathematics. Other curriculum areas are taught in an integrated way, using an inquiry approach. Students engage in rich learning experiences often using local, authentic learning contexts and ICT to support their learning. ERO discussed with school leaders the need to consider the inclusion of other languages, careers education and health in the Year 7 and 8 programme as part of the annual curriculum review.

Students benefit from increasing opportunities to undertake a variety of meaningful leadership roles, including membership of the student council. They enjoy camps, excursions, sports events and competitions, agricultural days, and celebrations of their learning and achievements. The school supports opportunities for gifted and talented students to extend their learning and also for students to engage in co-curricular activities such as learning a musical instrument and involvement in the Enviro schools' programme.

Students learn in well-resourced and attractively presented classrooms that promote their sense of belonging and reflect their work and success. Teachers establish caring, respectful relationships with students. They help them to manage their interactions positively, and set high expectations for learning and behaviour.

With the learner as the focus, teachers use a number of strategies that share the language of learning and promote 'learning to learn'. They explain the purpose of the learning, and what students need to do to succeed. Students are familiar with progressions in reading, writing and mathematics where they can identify and monitor their goals and achievements. Students with diverse needs are identified and supported. This work is guided by the school's own 'Success for All at Whatawhata School' document.

Teachers have engaged in a range of professional learning and development especially in literacy. The principal and deputy principal are providing teachers with research-based readings and theory to guide their practice and promote critical reflection. This is helping to foster shared understandings amongst staff and encourage deeper reflection within teams. There is now greater alignment between the school's priorities and teacher goals. The principal and staff need to continue to build a reflective and responsive professional culture to further improve teaching and learning.

#### **How effectively does the school promote educational success for Māori, as Māori?**

The school has strengthened its aims, goals and actions in relation to promoting educational success for Māori as Māori. Recent student achievement information has given the board, principal and teachers greater clarity about the urgent need to improve educational outcomes for Māori. Teachers are closely monitoring the progress and achievement of Māori students both schoolwide and at classroom level and are working with target students to accelerate their progress. They are including Māori contexts, culture and language into their programmes. In addition, the school has begun to increase engagement with Māori parents and whānau.

Participation in regular pōwhiri and kapa haka is growing in popularity amongst students and parents. The principal and some teachers are increasing their knowledge of te reo and tikanga Māori.

Agreed next steps for the board and principal are to:

- further accelerate the achievement and progress of Māori students
- further explore ways to consult with and engage Māori parents, whānau and iwi
- seek Māori representation on the board of trustees
- continue to embed bicultural practices across the school.

## **4 Sustainable Performance**

#### **How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance?**

The school is well placed to sustain and improve its performance because:

- trustees have a useful range of skills and expertise, are strongly focused on school improvement, and use evidence from self review to inform their decision making
- the principal is working closely with the board and staff to implement the school's priorities, raise student achievement, reflect on the effectiveness of decisions, and effectively manage the growth of the school
- there is good quality teaching and learning and a strong focus placed on accelerating the progress of priority learners
- parents and whānau are becoming increasingly engaged in their children's learning.

The board have implemented a planned process to review the school's policies and procedures. As part of this process, ERO recommends that the board review and revise the school's responsibilities regarding the employment of support staff and the monitoring of staff wellbeing.

## Board assurance on legal requirements

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

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

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

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

## When is ERO likely to review the school again?

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



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