

RANGIĀTEA

KAKAPO* COLLEGE

CASE STUDY

The Rangiātea project consists of case studies and exemplars from five secondary schools, each of them on a journey towards realising Māori student potential. The case studies look at the strategies used by the school leadership team and report on the key factors that contributed to lifting Māori student achievement. The exemplars step through how a particular programme has been used successfully in each school.

The work was funded by the Ministry of Education as part of the He Kākano project.

*** This school chose to remain unnamed and is called Kakapo College for the purposes of this report.**

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Kakapo College

CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

This case study explores the approaches that a principal and her leadership team took to maintain and continue to build on high levels of achievement for Māori students, harnessing commitment within the school and from the Māori community. A range of systems and processes to increase achievement by students, including Māori students, have been introduced over a number of years, and the current, first-time principal and her team have kept this momentum going.

The school community has a strong Māori presence including leadership roles on the board of trustees (BOT), senior staff positions, links with kaumātua, and the engagement and support of whānau and local Māori community. The school has a well-established whānau class. It also has a number of key Māori in its community with a longstanding commitment to raising Māori student achievement, who are available as a resource for the school.

The principal held a senior management position in the school for seven years up to 2001 and understands the origins of the school's vision. From her perspective, the first-time principal's role was a huge learning curve, especially in the first two years. She has an excellent relationship with the BOT, local kaumātua and her predecessor.

The principal is passionate about enhancing Māori student achievement and believes this requires all staff to be committed. She faces constant, tough resourcing issues—finding the right people, making judgements about the best areas to invest in, addressing challenges from within the teaching staff and from whānau and the community. Therefore, while there is an ongoing learning culture, the school is developing a range of innovative approaches, based on a genuine goodwill, willingness to try different approaches and passionate desire to see Māori students succeed as Māori (that is, on Māori terms).

Many of the areas the principal has emphasised are especially relevant for Māori. Areas of focus include the need to: navigate as a female leader in a context that required courageous conversations about the school's Treaty of Waitangi policy; support Māori protocols and action advice from the school's kaumātua; develop strong systems and relationships with whānau; and work collaboratively and collegially with the senior management team, all staff and the BOT.

According to the Education Review Office (ERO) report from 2009, her approach to school management is “well considered and gives priority to building leadership capacity at all levels of the school. Substantial focus is placed on working with teachers to further enhance the quality of school programmes. Teacher professional development places emphasis on increasing staff knowledge of effective teaching practices, and is soundly based on current educational research and theory.”

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Kakapo College is a decile 9, co-educational college located in an urban centre, with a roll of 1,178 students from Years 9–13. There are 181 Māori students at Kakapo College—they make up 16 percent of the school population. Māori students have a choice of being a part of the whānau class (a vertical form class) or mainstream classes.

Many whānau are related to one another or have lived in the community for a long time, and therefore whānau relationships are well established. Many of the Māori students come from professional families.

Whānau hui are well attended and whānau have been involved in a number of developments over the past three years, such as the development of the school's Treaty of Waitangi policy.

Te Whānau o Te Kakano (the whānau class) is 19 years old. The whānau class is an attraction for Māori whānau in the area who want to ensure that their children are in a supportive whānau environment at secondary school. There is strong support of the local kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa, and many students from these schools come to Kakapo College for their secondary education where the whānau class provides ongoing support for them to be educated as Māori. Those in the whānau class are expected to take te reo Māori and be in the kapa haka group, and their whānau are expected to support them in these endeavours. If Māori students elect to be in mainstream, they can still do te reo Māori and be in kapa haka (indeed, anyone can be in kapa haka). Some whānau elect to have one student in the whānau class and another in mainstream, which demonstrates the school's flexible approach to meeting each student's needs.

METHODOLOGY

Kakapo College was one of five mainstream schools selected for the research because it was rated one of the consistent performers in achieving high levels of Māori student success over time. There is good evidence that it is practising leadership of learning as well as enabling Māori student success on Māori terms. Furthermore, the school has achieved good engagement with Māori whānau and provided a different research context from other schools in the study as a decile 9, co-educational college in an urban setting with a relatively low Māori roll. The school has elected to remain anonymous for this project.

Researcher engagement with the school occurred from 18 May to 16 June 2010 and involved two data collection phases as well as subsequent contact by phone. Information collected was based on the areas the school identified as important to enhance Māori student achievement. An information sheet was provided to all interviewees and informed consent obtained from all research participants.

After the first phase of data collection, the researchers developed a summary of the key themes emerging from the interviews for the Ministry of Education, which commissioned the study. This summary helped identify priority areas of interest for the second round of data collection. Phase two of the data collection focused on (a) how school leaders enable Māori student achievement and (b) a specific initiative or approach developed in the school to drive Māori achievement.

To collect data, researchers used a range of interview approaches including individual, focus groups and pairs. Individual interviews generally ranged from 30–60 minutes, while focus groups took between one to two hours. In total, 12 people¹ were interviewed, including the senior management team, deans, teachers, students, whānau, pastoral staff and BOT members. A further nine self-completion student surveys were filled out. In addition, the school made available a wide range of monitoring and student achievement data including variance reporting, curriculum planners, faculty department reports and National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) data.

Establishing goals and expectations enhances Māori student achievement

Clear strategic goals to improve Māori student retention and achievement

The school has a strategic goal to improve student achievement of students at risk of not reaching their potential—particularly for Māori students. Annual plan goals for Māori student achievement include: strengthening home–school relationships; improving retention of male students; developing annual reporting to the BOT on the achievement of Māori students; increasing participation of Māori adults in community education classes; and completing consultation and review of the school’s Treaty of Waitangi policy.

More Māori students are staying on in Years 12 and 13, with retention increased from 25 percent to 48 percent between 2008 and 2010.

TABLE 1 Composition of Māori students at Kakapo College

	2008 (n=175)	2009 (n=184)	2010 (n=181)
Year 9	16%	16%	18%
Year 10	34%	19%	18%
Year 11	26%	30%	17%
Year 12	15%	22%	27%
Year 13	9%	13%	20%
Total	100%	100%	100%
% of base roll	14.9%	15.7%	16.2%
% students in Years 12 and 13	25%	34%	48%

High expectations of Māori student achievement

The school’s strategic, long-term goals to enable Māori learner achievement are communicated in clear, concrete terms in the school charter. A key goal is increased reporting on Māori student achievement (particularly junior student achievement) to the BOT. Targets are specified in general terms. There is strong evidence of data gathering and analysis to better understand the issues around attendance, suspensions, Māori student engagement and Māori student achievement.

The senior management team sets high expectations in relation to Māori students. This is a new focus for some teachers, and getting all staff to accept that they are responsible for the achievement of all the students in the school takes time:

The key to making further progress for us is having all staff accept that they’re responsible for the achievement of all the students in the school; that if a student fails a test or an assessment in one subject, it actually has an impact on the student’s overall achievement. So the teacher can’t just think, ‘Oh all right, they didn’t pass that, we’ll move on to the next topic.’ We need teachers to agonise about students not succeeding, and teachers to work out what they can do differently.
[Principal]

The school’s strategic and long-term goals are important to Māori whānau. Many whānau have close connections with others in the community. They have watched the school develop over the years and those whānau whose children were educated in te kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa like the way the school caters for Māori students, particularly the presence of the whānau class. Whānau also appreciate the school’s high expectation of Māori student achievement:

I feel privileged that my son is here. It is awesome to see Māori students achieving. I am glad I chose this school. I chose it because it had the whānau class here and I had talked to other parents and checked out the ERO reports prior to coming here. [Parent]

School’s strategic and long-term goals are important to Māori whānau

In retaining students longer, school has improved proportion of Māori students leaving Kakapo College with a Year 12 qualification or higher

Strong evidence of data gathering and analysis, to understand the issues around attendance, suspensions and Māori student engagement and achievement

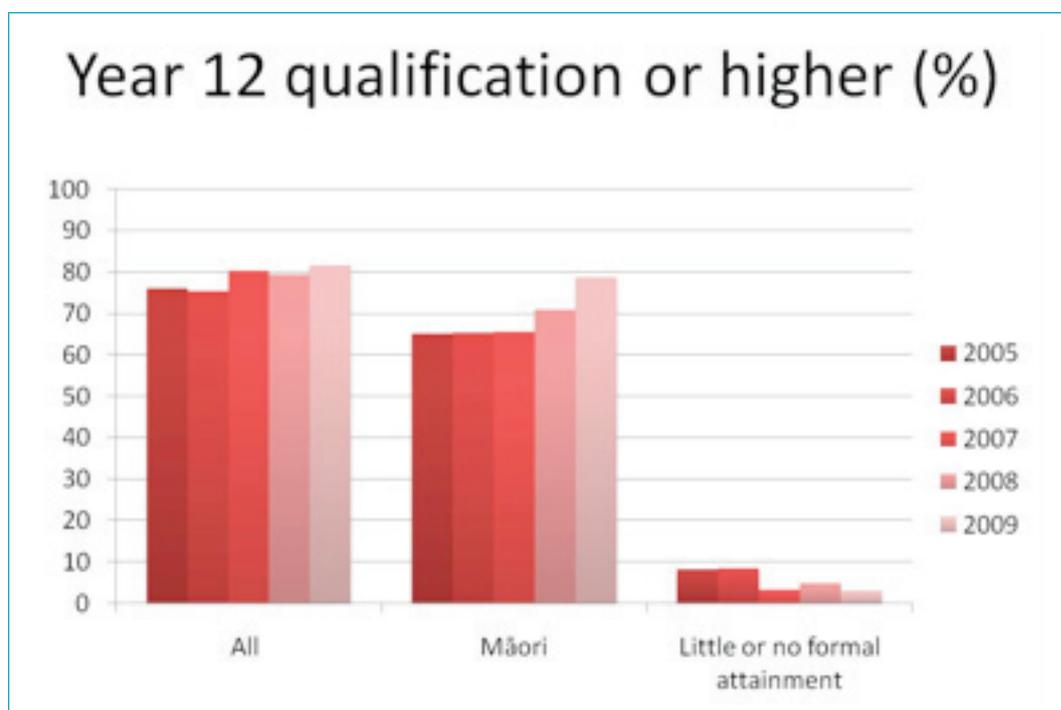
The principal is tough; she makes sure the kids do what they agreed to. She has high expectations for our kids. I like that our kids have pressure put on them, cos otherwise they can cruise by. She wants you to do it, she lifts the bar so that you can go to another rung. [Parent]

Having the whānau class is about our kids having the support; having each other—the whanaungatanga thing; the whānau camps at the beginning of the year where they instil the tuakana-teina principle from the word go. [Parent]

The principal recognises the valuable contribution the whānau class makes to achievement of Māori students within it and has implemented support systems to ensure that mainstream Māori student needs are catered for in similar ways.

Overall, the proportion of Māori students leaving Kakapo College with a Year 12 qualification or higher has increased as Māori student retention rates have improved. In 2009, 79 percent of Māori students who left the school attained a Year 12 qualification or higher.

FIGURE 1 School leavers from Kakapo College with a Year 12 qualification or higher



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

Levels of Māori student achievement at Kakapo College have been higher than the Māori national average for some time. However, within the school, there are plans in place to address the gap between Māori student achievement and school-wide success rates. The principal and senior management team set clear expectations that all staff teach in ways that engage Māori students.

There is strong evidence of data gathering and analysis to help understand the issues around attendance, suspensions and Māori student engagement and achievement. The principal and senior management team have a strong focus on tracking students' progress. One means of supporting teachers to work with the Māori students is core meetings where teachers of every subject for a particular class get together to talk about the progress of every student in the class and collectively plan toward student achievement:

We're increasingly requiring form teachers to be part of the academic mentoring of the students. We have core meetings for Year 9 where all the teachers of a particular class will get together and talk about the students and their potential based on their entry tests, and then how they are in class and what their achievement is like. We now need to take the next step and have teachers identify what they need to do in that class and make that a professional learning goal that the teacher will then report on. [Principal]

Resourcing strategically to enhance Māori student achievement

BOT has strong links to Māori ensuring Māori interests strongly represented

The principal and BOT resource Kakapo College strategically in a number of ways to meet the needs of its community. A key focus is on supporting Māori student achievement.

Three of the BOT members are Māori or have strong links to Māori, which ensures that Māori interests are strongly represented. From BOT level down there is support to resource initiatives that are important to Māori, such as supporting timetabling options for students taking te reo Māori.

Māori hold key positions in the school and their knowledge and experience in the community are valued. Māori members of staff have been integral to the developments within the school for Māori students:

Having the stability of longstanding Māori staff who have been with the school for more than 15 years really helps. [Principal]

There is targeted resourcing of Māori staff in roles that are considered pivotal to ensure the support of whānau in home–school relationships (for example, a Māori head of department, a Māori dean for the whānau class and a Māori student support role). In addition, a number of staff in senior positions are willing and able to support and encourage home–school partnerships.

The school has a designated senior position with responsibility for Māori student achievement and another staff member with responsibility for Pacific student achievement. Whānau appreciate these efforts to ensure their children are in a supportive environment:

The school as a whole is inclusive—there are good teachers, they are passionate about our kids' learning. [Named person] is cool, he listens to them, he is on their level and is humorous too. [Parent]

Strong pastoral care and resourcing of extracurricular activities and initiatives, ensuring Māori students get appropriate support

There is also resourcing for strong pastoral care and extracurricular activities and initiatives, which provides a space and place for all Māori students to get support. The school works with and responds to whānau aspirations and community needs and concerns. For instance, the school withdrew its kapa haka team from the annual inter-secondary schools kapa haka competition this year. Originally, the school located an excellent kapa haka coach, but the person could not start due to family commitments. Rather than put the students under undue pressure to succeed with an intense but short burst of coaching, with the support of whānau the school decided to withdraw from the competition.

The Māori community in Kakapo College is well established, and the kaumātua and whānau members have strong community links. The kaumātua commented to researchers on the challenges faced in the whānau class and spoke positively about the school support for the whānau class:

The whānau class is positive for Māori students, but it comes with some issues like trying to maintain the relevant level of staffing. It has been great to see BOT members, teachers and the principal present at whānau class events. [Kaumātua]

The work required to sustain whānau involvement and provide support for Māori students is challenging and takes time, ongoing resourcing and a collective and collaborative approach by all:

What we need more of is another teacher to support [named teacher] in the whānau class and there's a need for us to be more collaborative in the development of the Treaty policy. I acknowledge people have been trying to come to grips with it though. It's not easy. [Parent]

Resourcing for special initiatives in some subjects

There are special initiatives in some subjects. For instance, the English department offers curriculum streams specially designed to appeal to either boys or girls. In the stream most suited to boys, there are a number of examples where boys who might otherwise disengage are showing

interest in English and making steady and significant progress. Suitable media and texts of interest to Māori students are used. The school also brings Māori experts into the school, such as Māori writers and artists.

Student choice is the first stage of the process of assembling a timetable. Within budget parameters, the school endeavours to provide continuity for students who have committed to a specialist subject. The school is committed to offering Māori language at all levels.

The school is also committed to supporting students to identify a career focus. The range of activities offered includes a careers expo, and every second year there is a Māori careers evening:

Our greatest challenge is to give them every opportunity to open every door—and they may close that door because it does not fit, but they might open the door ... and find it leads to something else ...

We have a strong careers focus in the school. Every second year we have a Māori careers evening specifically for Māori and using past pupils, keynote speakers. [Māori dean]

The school administrative system has both a student achievement and pastoral care focus. This system and the supporting processes ensure timely follow-up of all students with attendance, engagement or behavioural issues.

Planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum to enhance Māori student achievement

Tikanga and/or a Māori dimension is present in the wider curriculum

Curriculum shaped to meet student needs

Form teachers a key link between home and school

PART A: ENSURING CURRICULUM QUALITY

There are a number of ways Kakapo College ensures quality in its curriculum. The college develops programmes of learning for students using topics that capture their interest, and the curriculum includes content relevant to the identity of Māori students in many areas. Tikanga or a Māori dimension is present in the wider curriculum so Māori students have the opportunity to engage with the curriculum on Māori terms. There is ongoing monitoring of teaching with a focus on what students are learning, and students are supported to reflect and provide feedback on their learning.

There is systematic monitoring of each student's progress, and Māori and Pacific students in particular. The school is genuinely focused on best outcomes for all students and ensuring all students have the opportunity to enjoy educational success. The school prides itself in offering strong educational pathways through NCEA Level 1, with a greater proportion of students succeeding through achievement standards (rather than unit standards).

The school has reshaped the curriculum to meet student needs. The school actively seeks student voice, both during the year and at the end of the year. The school aims to ensure that all Māori students experience a challenging and interesting programme of study. The school also aims to ensure that any Māori students requiring additional support are identified early and plans made to accelerate their progress. There is ongoing work to maximise the engagement of Māori students in classes. This was evident in the English classes for boys where classroom teachers built quality relationships with students and spent one-on-one time with them to increase their potential for success. Teachers also supported the boys by allowing them more time to complete work. With trust-based relationships, teachers are able to assist boys find topic areas of interest to write about:

One thing that I think really works well for all students and also for Māori students is the thematic approach that we have, so each term a different module is taught with different curriculum foci. It's teacher driven, responsive to students. An example of this is a unit—Made in Aotearoa—called 'Our voices' where we look at literature relevant to New Zealand and also issues unique to New Zealand. It's a responsibility to teach New Zealand literature, making the writing really relevant to students. Five students, for formal writing assessment, wrote a piece that Matariki should be a national holiday, so it's not just studying Māori writers—it's exploring Māori issues too. I love thematic teaching; it allows students to make links with their own lives. It's important to be flexible to [respond to] who is in your class. [Head of English]

Kakapo College has school-wide plans to collect the information needed to monitor progress on priority learning goals to enhance Māori learner achievement. The senior management team has organised to have the core meetings run by the form teacher, instead of senior managers, because it realised this was an opportunity for form teachers to be more involved in their form classes and learn about their students' progress from other teachers. Rather than just having a pastoral care role and a focus on their particular subject, form teachers are now also responsible for monitoring the academic progress of their form class in all subjects. The senior management team believes this change helps teachers take a more holistic approach to their students and ensures they are focused on student learning and achievement on a daily basis. Discussions of Māori student assessment data focus on the relationship between what was taught and what students learned. At this stage, the form teachers host the internal staff meeting about their

Feedback from students informs teachers' professional development

There is shared responsibility for improving quality of teaching for Māori students

Māori teachers and staff feel valued as Māori within the school

form class, and it is intended that, in the future, form teachers will also be responsible for conversations with parents—as the first point of contact ahead of the dean:

We think we've got the best of both worlds—we have a horizontal form system but the form teacher travels with the form class and the dean travels with the level, so students build relationships with those teachers, and we have a platform on which to build stronger relationships to inform teaching and learning, and we are working on that. In the past, form teachers have been focused on pastoral, attendance and discipline. In the future, they will focus more on achievement. [Principal]

There is an appraisal of classroom teaching by students. This is analysed according to students' ethnicity, so Māori student views can be aggregated and analysis conducted in terms of Māori in mainstream and Māori in whānau classes. Students in the whānau class reported the form class is helpful and they feel supported on a more personal level, and that the tuakana–teina principle has worked well:

In the whānau class there are three to four teachers to 40 students.² They keep a closer eye on us; we are told when we are going off track; we get pushed more and we know that the staff take a personal interest in us. [Student]

When I was in Year 9, I didn't have many role models around me. The tuakana–teina thing works well cos we have to lead by example and that goes for everyone in the whānau class. [Student]

There are also routine meetings to monitor student progress with a focus on results of particular students who might need support, including Māori students. The principal, senior management team, deans and form teachers value input from the Māori dean, student counsellor and the student support worker to determine the best ways to support Māori students. With the support of key Māori staff, it is possible for teachers to take a more holistic approach to engage Māori students and help them achieve success on Māori terms.

PART B: ENSURING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

Kakapo College ensures the quality of teaching for Māori students continues to improve by sharing responsibility for Māori students' progress across the teaching staff, drawing on the expertise of the Māori community and Māori staff, and by working hard to improve teacher practice.

The principal, senior management team and heads of department have the commitment, experience and interest to challenge and assist teachers to work effectively with Māori students. The Māori dean and student support worker have a deep understanding of the Māori community and, as a consequence, they are very well placed to provide insight and support for teachers who find Māori students challenging, providing a sounding board for teachers to discuss issues with students where needed.

Building a shared responsibility for Māori students' academic and social learning is an area where the school is making ongoing progress. The principal, senior management team, Māori staff and some teachers are particularly proactive. The principal believes staff need to know not just about students' academic achievement, but also their areas of strength outside the classroom:

Students learn best when they're taught by someone who likes them. [Principal]

One exercise initiated by the principal was to get staff to identify students' extracurricular activities and interests. This highlighted that some teachers knew very little about some of their students, raising awareness of the need for teachers to know students in a holistic way and ensure every student in the school has strong relationships with some staff.

There is strong collegiality amongst the Māori teachers, and Māori staff feel valued on Māori terms within the school. Those with particular expertise in te reo Māori and tikanga Māori help other teachers in the school to develop their knowledge and skills. Māori teachers commented

Staff appraisals include feedback from students

that it is possible when there is a critical mass of four of them, to sustain a high level of support for Māori students. However, when there are fewer Māori on staff, providing support for Māori students can be taxing.

Assessment data are used to monitor Māori learner achievement and ensure students stay on track. Kakapo College is keen to learn of new ways to monitor and better support its students, particularly Māori students. The senior management team has identified another nearby school that they feel they can learn from regarding ways to collect, analyse and report on student achievement. They are working with this school to improve their own practices.

The school's senior management team champions the need for teachers to modify their approaches in order to meet student needs. Māori staff are vigilant about the needs of Māori students and provide support to teachers who struggle to engage students. The processes within the school are student oriented, and there is a constant challenge to teachers to change their approaches if current approaches do not work well for Māori students. The head of English actively mentors her team to look for ways to engage with students. All students, including Māori students, provide feedback to teachers on what they are learning. Students and teachers are involved in an ongoing dialogue and reflection about student learning during the year. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on student learning as part of the departmental process for developing curriculum.

Feedback from students about their learning forms part of teachers' appraisals. Student surveys are used to gather feedback on their teachers' performance on up to 28 attributes. The results are analysed according to ethnicity and gender. Teachers who require support for working with Māori students receive it in whatever form is appropriate. At times, the student support worker may observe a class to learn of the relational dynamics between the teacher and student:

For example, it's important the teacher pronounces the student's name correctly. [Principal]

Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development to enhance Māori student achievement

Māori student achievement patterns are analysed and used to plan professional learning priorities

A number of strategies are used to encourage open discussion of how to improve teaching and learning for Māori students

At the principal, senior management team and head of department level, Māori student achievement patterns are analysed and used to plan professional learning priorities, such as the thematic teaching approach for English. There is a genuine desire to enhance Māori student achievement, and this is a passion of the leadership team. There is open discussion of Māori students' results, and teachers are encouraged to help each other develop teaching strategies that are more effective:

I feel lucky to be physically close to the Māori department, [in the] classroom next door—so [there is] lots of informal talking that really pays off. Students know that we talk about them and their learning and they appreciate it. [Head of English]

The senior management team and the Māori staff challenge and support teachers to improve teaching for those Māori students who remain disengaged. The principal sets priorities to ensure that any problem or issue for Māori students is addressed in a timely manner. The principal also has the support of the BOT and community to resource appropriately in order to support Māori students. Support is provided to teachers who have difficulty helping Māori students reach important academic and social goals, but this area is still work in progress.

A number of strategies are used to encourage open discussion of how to improve teaching and learning for Māori students at Kakapo College and to support teachers to work together to develop more effective teaching strategies. These include:

- case study meetings that are held weekly amongst deans and guidance staff to brainstorm needs and determine strategies around attendance, engagement and achievement
- deans meetings that are held twice a term
- core meetings that focus on how to maximise positive outcomes for students
- administrative systems that enable sharing about student learning, based on student achievement data.

There is an emerging culture in some departments of deciding to maintain or to change particular teaching approaches based on evidence about their impact on students, including Māori students. There are some areas where this is particularly successful, such as in the English department, that offers a range of English courses.

But both from within the school (including the principal, senior management team, heads of department and staff) and from the community (including BOT, kaumātua and whānau) there is an acknowledgement that enhancing Māori teaching and learning is an ongoing challenge. The uptake of a student-centred approach where Māori can engage in learning on Māori terms is still uneven:

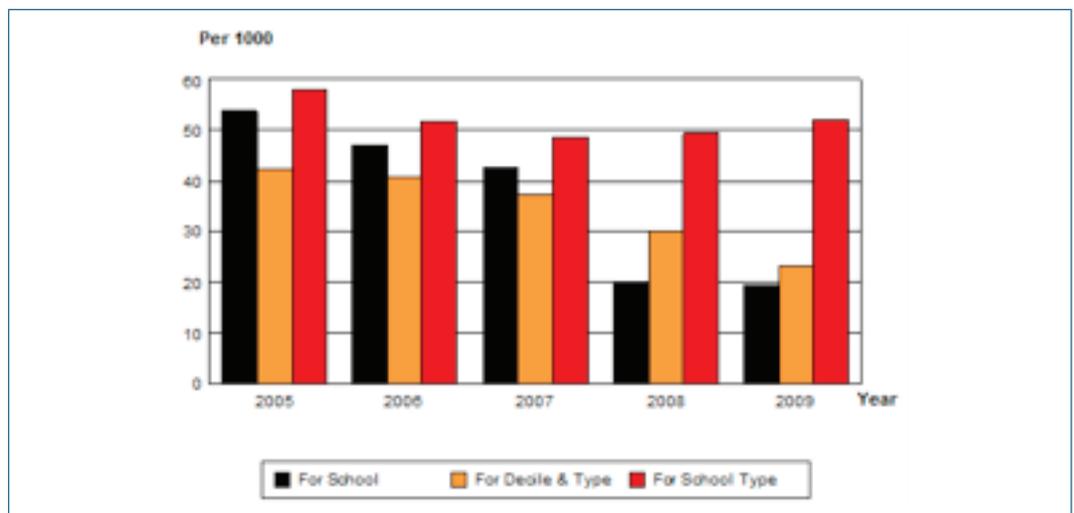
What I want is for people to be captured by doing the right things for the students and to be swayed by the success they see around them. [Principal]

Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment enhances Māori student achievement

Environment is orderly, and there are clear processes to address behavioural issues

Kakapo College has a respectful environment and the principal and senior management team support restorative practice where problems and challenges occur. The environment is orderly, and there are clear processes to address behavioural issues. The school understands that teenagers make mistakes and increasingly takes a restorative approach, rather than a punitive approach, to put things right. This is evident in the reduced number of stand-downs that have been actioned over the past few years, as is shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 Stand-downs per 1,000 students at Kakapo College



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

While there is a behavioural “bottom line” and over the past five years an average 16 students per year were suspended, the school aims to use the stand-down and suspension process in a restorative manner rather than excluding or expelling students:

The school takes a hard line and is unafraid to use stand-downs and suspensions to support school discipline. However, they are used in a restorative manner; there is considerable compassion at board level and students are generally reinstated. Our exclusion and expulsion rates are very low. [Principal]

The principal takes a collaborative approach in working to enhance Māori learner achievement. Researchers visiting the school observed that a respectful learning culture was modelled by the principal and senior management team. The views of the kaumātua, whānau, the BOT and staff are all valued by the principal and senior management team. The principal finds it is important to take time to work through issues. As a result, both students and staff work and learn in a safe, supportive and orderly environment, in line with the school mission statement:

Kakapo College aims to create an environment where students have a love of learning, think critically, strive to excel in all fields of endeavour, respect themselves and others for their differences and contribute positively in all walks of life. [Kakapo College mission statement]

Views of the kaumātua, whānau, the BOT and staff are all valued by the principal

The school aims to be a place where Māori students can thrive “as Māori”, as encapsulated in Sir Apirana Ngata’s whakatauāki:

“E tipu e rea mo ngā ra o tou ao

Ko to ringa ki nga rākau a te Pākehā

Hei oranga mo to tinana

Ko te ngākau ki ngā taonga a o tupuna

Hei tikitiki mo to mähunga

Ko to wairua ki te Atua

Nāna nei ngā mea katoa”

“Your hands mastering the tools of the Pākehā for your well-being,

Your heart cherishing the gifts of your Māori ancestors to be worn as a plume for your head.”³

Student management system supports student achievement

The school’s emphasis on pastoral care includes a number of approaches to support all students, including Māori students. The school has a range of systems and resources that are co-ordinated to monitor and address behavioural issues amongst students. The school maximises the use of its student management system to support both academic and pastoral goals. The system includes photos of students, each student’s timetable, attendance details and a messaging system. It also includes academic records, including the number of NCEA credits achieved and simple graphs of overall performance on NCEA including literacy and numeracy results.

Absence and truancy rates generally low

The administrative database provides timely information to all teachers of students’ attendance (or nonattendance) and is an efficient system for sending alerts to teachers if there are important issues affecting a student’s wellbeing. While there are some variations, in 2009 students’ attendance rates were generally above 80 percent including justified absences. Māori absence rates overall were 16.3 percent including justified absences with truancy rates of 6.5 percent. It is evident that the school works hard to ensure students are in school.

Real-time monitoring of students

The database also provides a platform for real-time monitoring of students, as it contains both academic and pastoral care data. This system supports the work of the student counsellor and senior management, who have a focus on Māori students and monitor their achievement regularly. They find the system also helps to track NCEA results, and is useful for showing students the progress they have made to date and what to focus on next. This systematic data collection helps pinpoint behavioural issues such as attendance, so that any variance can be addressed in a timely manner:

Attendance is monitored very closely. When I see within two days where a student has been late for several classes or there is a question mark about attendance, I ring the parents straight away ... Early intervention is my key. [Māori dean]

Consistent approach to student behaviour management

There is a clear aim for consistency in student behaviour management to enhance Māori learner achievement within the school. The principal, with the support of the senior management team and Māori staff, drives a pastoral care approach to students, rather than a punitive approach. Pastoral care is particularly strong in the whānau class and is being progressively embedded in the rest of the school. For instance, the school is moving toward using suspension hearings in a restorative way. So where a student was caught tagging, they were required to spend one week with the school groundsman and developed a new respect for the groundsman’s role.

The kaumātua spoke positively about his experiences of BOT and student disciplinary meetings. He has attended six over the past 18 months and found each of them to be encouraging for the students:

These meetings are hugely encouraging for the students—the issue gets laid down, there is compassion, acknowledgement of where support is needed and there is more of a family spirit evident. [Kaumātua]

Māori students say the school pays attention to their views

Māori students say the school pays attention to their views and input to determine the initiatives that are supported (for example, tuakana–teina (big sister–little sister), and the mentoring programme). However, Māori students suggested that even more could be done to include Māori views about the school culture and practices. Given this school is constantly striving for improvement, it is not surprising that the principal, senior management team, BOT and Māori staff concur with the students' view.

School is a positive environment for Māori students. The principal is focused on education and success, and on providing extra opportunities for study and catch-ups where possible. She takes an individual interest in students and their work. Students report that they feel encouraged, supported and challenged and that staff—and the principal in particular—have a keen interest in their education:

Our principal takes an interest in us, she listens, makes me feel special and says that education is the main priority. [Student]

Māori students also report that their teachers believe in them, encourage and motivate them and are prepared to provide extra help to support their success:

They encourage and motivate us. [Student]

They spend hours out of school to help me with work and problems. [Student]

Most Māori students report they feel “awesome” or “pretty good” about being Māori at Kakapo College and feel the school encourages them to feel proud about being Māori “a lot”. Students say the principal and the senior teachers encourage them to do kapa haka or sport or other after-school activities. Students feel the school really wants them to do well and say that the principal and the senior teachers encourage them to achieve:

School gets more comfortable as you get older; when you get to Year 13 it's like you get more space; you have formed relationships with the teachers over the years and it feels like you get treated with more respect. It really helps when you've been with a teacher through a succession of years and you know their teaching style. It really feels like they won't give up on you. [Student]

The school constantly monitors Māori students; much of this occurs through pastoral care. Most students feel safe at school, and there were no mentions from Māori students of feeling unsafe.

Pastoral care at Kakapo College extends beyond the school into the community: Kakapo College is part of the Rock On programme which builds interagency support systems within a region through representatives from the local schools, Special Education Services, Ministry of Education regional office, the Police and the Ministry of Social Development's Strengthening Families project.

Māori students say the school encourages them to be successful and to feel proud of being Māori

Ensuring educationally powerful connections with Māori whānau and the Māori community enhances Māori student achievement

School's affirmation of Māori students continues to be a strength

Māori hold positions of influence in the school and are respected

Principal seeks guidance from kaumātua on matters of tikanga

School uses wide range of approaches to communicate meaningfully and positively with whānau

Makes it easy for whānau to communicate with school

There is a strong commitment to making educationally powerful connections between Kakapo College and its Māori whānau and community. This includes: BOT representation; kaumātua involvement; effective communication with whānau; telling whānau when their students are doing well; and building strong relationships with whānau as well as celebrating Māori success. The ERO 2009 report acknowledged that the school's affirmation of Māori students continues to be a strength of the school. The school supports Māori achieving on Māori terms in a number of ways.

Firstly, Māori are represented in the school in positions of influence. There is a sizeable Māori representation on the BOT, in the senior management team and in the pastoral support team—and across these functions there are substantial links with whānau. Senior management and Māori staff have credibility in the community, through having worked at the school for many years, whanaungatanga connections or having come from the community.

Secondly, the school's kaumātua is highly respected, reflecting the value that the BOT and staff place on Māori protocols and the principles of biculturalism. The school kaumātua is a key leader and contributor in the school who provides cultural advice and is a sounding board for the principal and staff on Māori issues. In addition, the kaumātua is involved in disciplinary meetings, blesses buildings and attends pōwhiri. The principal and staff spoke highly of the kaumātua and the role he plays in encouraging them to operate in culturally appropriate ways.

For instance, when the principal first joined the school she sought guidance from the kaumātua on the tension between the need to speak and show leadership as principal and the possibility it would not be appropriate for her to speak at pōwhiri because she is a woman. In this instance, the kaumātua came up with a suitable solution. At pōwhiri, the kaumātua or a male member of staff speaks first and then the principal, who is seated in the front row, speaks second:

It's an important process coming up with a solution for each individual and school. I would encourage [going through the process]. I understand it's a precious relationship [between the school and our kaumātua] and therefore important that we find a respectful solution. [Principal]

Thirdly, the school uses a wide range of approaches to communicate meaningfully and inclusively with whānau, including hui held each term, letters home when students are doing well, online bookings for parent–teacher interviews, annual poroporoaki to farewell Year 12 and Year 13 students and two-yearly Māori careers evenings. Hui are held each term to discuss student achievement and kapa haka activities, and to provide parents with information about future events. Meetings are well attended, and whānau appreciate the opportunity to discuss relevant school matters and to be updated about the progress of their children.

The school aims to set up positive communication with whānau through a number of means. For junior school students, there is a blue card system to reinforce student effort. When students get five blue cards, the teacher sends a letter home along the lines of, “Dear Parent, just writing to congratulate you on your son/daughter getting five blue cards. It's a reward system. They have received a little voucher for the shop.”

The senior management team encourages teachers to issue blue cards on a regular basis.

The school tries to make it easy for whānau to communicate with them. For instance, the school moved to an online booking system to set up parent–teacher interviews this year. The school wrote to whānau and told them how to go to the website, log on and book their

School continues to look for ways to improve the process of communicating with whānau about student progress

Trialling a parent online portal so whānau can check children's progress in real time

Relationships are key

sessions. Whānau gave positive feedback about this system, as they could log on and book their appointments at times that suited them.

Another example is a poroporoaki (farewell) organised by Year 12 students at the end of each school year, which is an opportunity to farewell those students who are leaving and celebrate their success, and to catch up with former students and learn of their various career and life pathways. Students, teachers, BOT members, whānau and the wider local Māori community attend this.

Once every two years the school holds a Māori careers evening. A key reason for this is to get students and their parents to begin talking about what students would like to do when they leave school. The principal and senior management team support the work of Māori staff and the careers guidance staff to work with students to help them locate areas of interest. This helps students focus their studies. The school has found students have an ongoing need for discussions and information about career options:

Students come with their parents and you see them leave afterwards talking about whether it's a good idea to do this or that ...

Anything that increases that two-way conversation between home and school I think is really important. [Principal]

The school also holds pōwhiri to welcome visitors and supports performances by the kapa haka group—activities that are valued by whānau.

The school also continues to look for ways to improve the process of communicating with whānau regarding student progress.

Whānau rely on the school to tell them when their children are doing well—and when they are not doing so well. The school is in the process of providing an online parent portal that enables whānau to check their children's progress in real time. The portal contains attendance data, assessments completed and how well they achieved in those assessments. Parents can also see when assessments are due. The aim is to provide a more convenient way for both the school and whānau to check that a student is on track. It will also enable whānau to be more engaged in their young person's learning in a timely manner but at times that suit the whānau:

We are going to be part of a trial establishing a parent portal which means that any day parents would be able to look in and see their child's attendance, completed assessments, whether they've been successful or not and increasingly they'll be able to see what the assessment result was. It will be great for us, because we put a lot of effort into sending an assessment calendar to parents so that they can know when assessments are coming up. A parent portal is a seamless way of doing it where we won't have to make a point of telling parents, and parents won't have to ask us for information. They will be able to go online to look on there to check their child's progress at any time. [Principal]

Furthermore, Kakapo College builds connections with Māori whānau and the Māori community through relationships. As already mentioned, there is strong support for Māori students from the Māori dean and student support worker, who are well known in the community. In addition, systems and processes support the form class teacher so they have the opportunity to build a strong relationship with whānau. Students have some subject teachers for more than a year, which facilitates greater relationship building with the students and their whānau. The school also has a close relationship with its kaumātua, who has considerable influence in the school and is valued for his ability to find ways of working to support Māori students.

The principal leads in a way to facilitate success for Māori students on Māori terms. She is a leader of learning, working towards better results for Māori. The proportion of Māori in the senior school has increased from 25 percent to 48 percent since 2008, and whānau are hearing positive reports from others of the school's passion for Māori to achieve success as Māori.

Engaging in constructive problem talk enhances Māori student achievement

Principal has deep understanding of the community

The principal of Kakapo College was originally the deputy principal at the college for seven years, left for a few years and came back when the previous principal left. She counts the previous principal as a friend and only put herself forward for the position as she passionately believed in the general vision and values of Kakapo College. She did not see herself as necessarily “principal material” but wanted Kakapo College to continue to thrive and build on the legacy established by the previous administration. The principal and BOT observe that her style is very different from her predecessor, and she has sought to be authentic in her approach and to find ways that work for her:

The previous principal had a completely different style from me—but with many of the same values underneath. [Principal]

The principal initially found the role as first-time principal challenging, and had to find her own style, as well as negotiate her role as a female leader in Māori situations. She drew on the support of the kaumātua to navigate her way through local tikanga:

I've been principal here for four years, and it's the hardest job I have ever done. For the first two years I thought, 'I will never be able to do this satisfactorily.' Now I think in time I will be able to do it, but there are always new challenges that undermine that view. [Principal]

Principal focused on and engaged with Ministry-driven initiatives to improve Māori student achievement

The strong focus on Māori student achievement, which is embedded in the school, arose as a result of two factors. Firstly, the strong relationships with the Māori community that have been built over a long period of time help to make initiatives possible. In addition, the current principal arrived at the school around the time the Ministry of Education set up specific initiatives to enhance Māori student achievement and was prepared to make those a focus:

I joined the school at the time the Ministry pushed out all the targets to schools to improve Māori student achievement and started encouraging schools to look at the statistics and use evidence and make comparisons. So the whole country has moved to focus more on Māori student achievement—that is what Ka Hikitia is about—it's about the achievement ... The strong direction from the Ministry to address issues of Māori achievement has certainly influenced the actions we have, and I recognise the importance for Māori. [Principal]

Early on in her tenure, the principal, her senior management team and the BOT decided to raise Māori student achievement for all key indicators. While she would now say the approach they took was a deficit approach, they found this a helpful place to start:

One key target was to get Māori student achievement to within 10 percent of our whole school achievement in all measures. We were not comparing Māori kids with other schools or national stats; just within our school. And we are achieving that on the whole with varying success ... Now when I think of that approach it smacks of deficit ... We should focus on everyone doing as well as they can, so you learn as you go along ... But it was quite affirming: there were positive stats that came out of that for us because there have been times for us when our Māori student achievement has been stunningly good. [Principal]

School constantly looks for new ways to use data to inform teaching and learning

The school's use of data to track student performance is still quite broad in its approach, and the principal constantly looks for ways for the school to improve its ability to use data to inform teaching and learning. She reaches out to those in her community who offer interesting alternatives to her current approach, and there is a sense that improving the use of data continues to be work in progress:

Our use of evidence isn't as good as it could be. We are in desperate need of a statistician ... Liz McKinley's Star Path project at the University of Auckland is all about raising student achievement in low-decile schools. The problem is that too many students end up on pathways that will not lead them to university. We visited a Star Path school. Although the Star Path project

Principal encourages reflective practice

is not focusing on decile 9 schools, we thought we could learn from what they are doing at another local school. They have really strong data management, and they can drill down into their data. They have got someone who can give them much more detail. They are using that information to coach and mentor kids on a more individual basis. There is still a lot we have to do here.

[Principal]

The principal is constantly reflecting on ways to learn more from the existing data collected. She is convinced that data analysis needs to be a skill set of at least one teacher within the school, rather than something others do for the school:

As a nation, if we want to improve outcomes for students we need to have more people who can manage the data. The comparison I use is to guidance counsellors. When guidance counsellors were introduced into schools there was targeted professional development for teachers who were interested in this career path. I believe the person who processes the data needs to be a teacher. I can't recruit a stats graduate ... it needs to be someone who understands students, timetabling, the student management system, NCEA, pathways for students. So you need to get a teacher.

[Principal]

The principal does not rely solely on data for decision making. She is naturally observant, reflective and curious, and some of the initiatives arise out of reflecting on what she sees and hears. There have been benefits—including recently adding another male staff member.

The school recognised that a group within the school needed more support, and a large proportion of those were boys—and in particular, Māori boys. A key factor in moving forward was for the school to recognise and accept the issue and secure adequate resources to support these students. The principal commented that funding from international students generally funds additional teachers. The school has a philosophy that “what works for Māori works for everyone”, so it is happy to try to identify approaches that will support Māori student achievement.

It is important there are clear signs of Māori achievement in the school. The principal believes that Māori success starts with strong pastoral care. Allowing students and whānau time to develop relationships with key teachers such as deans and form teachers is also vital:

The school has had a longstanding focus on supporting Māori students to achieve, but more recently with the new curriculum, the developments have been in pedagogy rather than pastoral care. The whole school has the warm feeling that it does because there was a real focus on the pastoral side of the school. The form teacher starts with a class in Year 9 and goes through with them to Year 13. It's about building relationships. [Principal]

The senior management team also believes that all students need a good relationship with a staff member in the school who takes responsibility for overseeing their academic achievement:

The only thing that really makes a difference is having a one-on-one conversation with a student. What we have to do now is change our systems increasingly so that we get one-on-one conversations and that they have one significant adult who is responsible for their academic achievement. [Head of department]

The principal, senior management team and Māori staff—and some of the teaching staff—believe that Māori students need to be visibly successful. The principal is delighted that both the current head boy and head girl are Māori:

Both head students are Māori. That was democracy at work ... That was through their own personal strength and qualities. [Principal]

The school is also careful not to take credit for success that is not due. In the principal's view, some Māori students are exceptional and would be successful at any school. However, the principal would like to see more Māori students achieving at this high level:

But some Māori students would have been successful at any school—some were going to succeed anyway, so we have to be careful not to over claim. [Principal]

Māori success starts with strong relationships and strong pastoral care

Principal has humility and uses research on teaching and learning to inform important school decisions about Māori student achievement

Principal passionate about success for Māori students as Māori

Distributed leadership model evident in the school

The Leadership Best Evidence Synthesis (BES) research approach emphasises the role of the principal as the leader of learning who shows pedagogical leadership to improve student outcomes. At Kakapo College there was clear evidence that the principal comes to the position with a great deal of humility and uses research on teaching and learning to inform important school decisions about Māori student achievement.

Both feedback and feedforward are encouraged by the principal, as she feels that the feedback students give staff is vital. The principal and senior management team try to base what they do on theory but find it is vital to turn that knowledge into leadership that changes what happens in the class.

The 2009 ERO report identified the principal's strategic approach to building capacity in the school:

The principal's approach to school management is well-considered and gives priority to building leadership capacity at all levels of the school. Considerable focus has been placed on working with teachers to further enhance the quality of school programmes. Teacher professional development places emphasis on increasing staff knowledge of effective teaching practices and is soundly based on current educational research and theory.

The principal was familiar with the BES approach, along with a range of professional development opportunities to drive leadership of learning. She is also passionate about the need for success for Māori students "as Māori". She spoke of how literature about Māori student achievement and professional development opportunities has helped her gain a better understanding of how to work with Māori whānau. She had found some of the literature from the University of Waikato's Te Kotahitanga programme useful:

The big thing from Russell Bishop's book for me, was that as a school we need to work on contacting parents when students do things right, as often as when students do things wrong.
[Principal]

The principal is also aware of the knowledge held within the community and learns from her kaumātua, BOT and Māori staff members about tikanga Māori.

BES also includes the idea of distributed leadership, and there is clear evidence that the Kakapo College principal has worked hard to foster a collegial approach to teaching and learning amongst staff. In 2009, ERO reported:

The school's professional development programme is soundly based on current educational research and theories about effective teaching and learning. The programme provides opportunities for teachers to explore key literature, trial new teaching techniques, and to discuss and share good practice within and across departments. Involvement in the ICT project is helping teachers to extend the range of e-learning strategies used in programme delivery and for monitoring student progress and achievement. This well-considered approach to staff development provides a sound basis for building the school's capacity to meet the differing abilities of students.

Leadership at times also comes from the teachers. Some teachers have a keen interest in professional learning and work with the senior management team to develop professional learning workshops for the staff. One recent workshop was based on the BES approach. The senior leadership team wanted staff to understand and to see the evidence of student learning within the school. The senior leadership team and two teachers decided to provide case studies about where things were not working so well within the school. They developed case studies by talking with students who showed strong potential in a particular subject in Year 9 but no longer appeared to be meeting their anticipated potential in the senior school. The leadership team conveyed to the staff that the school's programmes were failing for these students. The school wanted to provide evidence to staff and then get them to reflect on how their teaching practice might have to change. The senior management team thought it was important for teachers not to be complacent about student achievement or to ignore those who are not achieving well or achieving to less than their potential:

**Principal and
BOT have
excellent
relationship**

There are lots of staff in the school who think this is a good school, and the students here do fine and I'm happy—but we want everyone to own the achievement of every student. [Head of department]

[Name] came up with some NCEA results. [There was] an example of a student, who ... did their mid-year test in Year 9 [and] looked at what their predicted results were based on their ability. Then [we saw] what their actual results were [and this student was] showing uneven achievement in different areas. So this student got more than half of their ... all of their credits from two subjects ... and got hardly anything in [others]. What we want is for the staff to own the problem. [Head of department]

The BOT maintains that the principal and her senior leadership team work hard on building good relationships with students and whānau. They believe the principal delegates responsibility and is an effective leader and manager. There is consensus that the principal is considered in her approach, has excellent judgement, is hardworking and tries to be fair and equitable so students, including Māori students, can achieve.

In this section, we leave the last word to the principal:

I've got a great quote—'If things are not all right in the classroom, they will not be all right anywhere. Never pass a student without thinking about them.' Sir James Darling (1899–1995), Headmaster Geelong Grammar School 1930–1961. [Principal]

FURTHER READINGS

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The research team included Kataraina Pipi, Kellie Spee and Nan Wehipeihana. At their invitation, Judy Oakden led the team and had overall responsibility for the project.

(Footnotes)

- 1 Note: A number of the senior management team and staff were interviewed more than once.
- 2 The student is referring to teachers and support workers in the class.
- 3 Source: Royal, V. (2009). *Māori Student Engagement* (p. 1). Unpublished report. Kakapo College.



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