

# **RANGIĀTEA**

## **HAMILTON GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL**

### **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.**

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# Hamilton Girls' High School

## CASE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION

In the past six years at Hamilton Girls' High School (HGHS), the principal and senior leadership/management (SLM) team have promoted a community approach to accelerating academic and social learning so students achieve their potential despite any challenges. In its latest report (2010), the Education Review Office (ERO) identified seven areas of strength: governance; leadership; reflective practice; engaging students; school culture; teaching and learning; and success for Māori.

The most positive features of the school as reported in the review were:

- a commitment to promote achievement and success for Māori students and to ensure that their culture and identity are valued in the school
- a developing school-wide learning community characterised by reflective practice and a desire for continuous improvement
- promoting student engagement with a focus on attendance and providing opportunities for students to achieve success in academic, sporting and cultural experiences
- a highly inclusive school-wide culture that supports students' learning and holistic wellbeing
- teachers who are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subject areas, demonstrate a willingness to consider new ideas and maintain respectful and affirming relationships with students.

The school's proactive, responsive and respectful processes encourage Māori students and their whānau to believe that success and achievement are within their grasp. School initiatives are based on the value of lifelong learning, and a commitment and passion for achievement from the principal and leadership team. The principal has tremendous energy, commitment and drive to see all students, and particularly Māori students, achieve to their potential:

*ERO has confirmed emphatically what we hoped would be very visible to them in our recent three-yearly external review. These seven areas celebrate a well-rounded, ambitious, never-resting school. It is critical we continue to build on all areas of strength. Over the years, staff have worked hard with the girls, with learning always our focus, to gain this reputation. We have pushed and challenged ourselves to always reflect our vision and motto. [Principal]*

The school advertises its philosophy on the school website as being about harmony and understanding:

<i>E te iwi nga kaihautu o te waka Tainui kei raro I te mana o Te Atairangikaahu me te Kahui Ariki. Tena rawa atu koutou.</i>	<i>Greetings to the parents and supporters, the people of Hamilton and surrounding districts.</i>
<i>E te iwi whanui e tautoko mai nei i a matou. Tena koutou katoa. E ai ki to tatou tupuna "Kotahi te kohao o te ngira, E kuhuna ai te miro ma, te miro pango, te miro whero."</i>	<i>A famous proverb spoken by the first Māori King, Potatau Tewherowhero, says, "Through the one eye of the needle pass the white threads, the black threads and the red threads. Always hold firmly to your love, the law and the faith."</i>
<i>No reira, nga mihi ki a koutou k a tatou katoa.</i>	<i>This is an eloquent plea for harmony and understanding.</i>
<i>Tena Tatou Katoa.</i>	<i>Greetings to you all.</i>

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

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HGHS is a decile 6, single-gender school located in Hamilton City in the Waikato, with 1,550 students from Years 9 to 13. It is the only girls' state school in the Waikato. The high school caters to more than 50 ethnicities, with Māori comprising 25 percent of the student roll. The Māori student roll has been steadily increasing and in 2010, 30 percent of the Year 9 cohort were Māori. ERO's ethnicity statistics for HGHS in August 2010 were: Pākehā/NZ European—49 percent; Māori—25 percent; and other ethnicities—26 percent.

The current principal has been at HGHS since 2004 and is a first-time principal. Believing that leaders need to lead by example, she advocates for "lifelong learning", and is highly driven to extend her own knowledge and that of her staff. She works collegially and collaboratively with her SLM team, and draws input from a range of professional learning opportunities, including expertise from external sources. She places high value on developing and maintaining strong relationships with staff, students, whānau and the wider community—and all these groups speak highly of her leadership skills.

## METHODOLOGY

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HGHS is one of five mainstream schools selected for the research because it had higher-than-average Māori student retention and achievement for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2. In addition, it provided a different research context from other schools in the study—as a decile 6, single-gender college in an urban community, with a diverse student population of more than 50 cultures and ethnicities. Further, the Māori student roll is increasing at a fast pace, indicating whānau satisfaction with the school. Researcher engagement with the school occurred from 3 May to 22 June 2010 and involved two data collection phases. Further information was obtained from the school after this; this phase was completed by 12 December 2010. Information collection was based on 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.

Researchers used a range of interview approaches to collect data, including individual, focus groups and pairs. Individual interviews generally ranged from 30–60 minutes, while focus groups took between one to two hours. A total of 33 people were interviewed including the SLM team, deans, heads of learning areas, teachers, students, whānau, pastoral staff and board of trustees (BOT) members. A further 29 self-completion student surveys were filled in. In addition, the school made available a wide range of monitoring and student achievement data, including midYIS results, NCEA data, attendance reports and variance effectiveness reports.

## Setting high goals and expectations for Māori student achievement

High standards and expectations of all students, including Māori students

Principal believes in lifelong learning

Whānau involvement in school strategic plan

Expectations clearly articulated

The HGHS principal and the SLM team have high standards and expectations for all Māori students. They have developed systems and structures within the school that focus all school staff on addressing specific barriers to learning and increasing understanding and knowledge of Māori students, as well as Māori language and tikanga (customs and traditions). HGHS staff have promoted and communicated the expectations for Māori students to whānau, and staff actively support students to reach their full potential.

The principal champions an ethos of self-responsibility to all school staff, students and whānau within a nonblaming environment. All stakeholders or partners of the school are asked to play an active role in the education of the students:

*We don't apologise about our strongly held expectations. All of us (girls and staff) are learners lifelong. By committing to each other we believe we all will be in the position to experience the opportunities to succeed.* [Principal's page, HGHS newsletter, September 2010]

The principal instils the importance of lifelong learning—where education is more than imparting academic information and includes pastoral care and social learning. The pervasive attitude within the school is one of continual evaluation and action in order to realise the personal best of each student:

*All girls can achieve and the expectation is that each time we look at stats they will be achieving better.* [Principal]

The principal and SLM team clearly communicate the school's goals and expectations to staff, students and whānau in a variety of ways, including: the *Student, Staff, and Parent Manual*; student diaries; HGHS newsletters; and the school charter. These documents articulate the strategic vision of the school: “that graduates will be self-sufficient, resilient young women, and the school will support the development of strong personal identity and high self-esteem”.

Whānau and students are key participants in the development of the school's strategic, long-term goals. The desire of whānau for their daughters to become educated and successful is reflected in the school's actions. HGHS policies, such as its policy on attendance, are clearly stated in student diaries, and students and whānau are well informed about their responsibilities and the consequences of low attendance. The school has worked hard to raise attendance, clearly spelling out its expectations to both students and whānau. Any attendance concerns are shared immediately with whānau, and poor attendance has consequences for students. Privileges like attending the school ball, representing the school at tournaments and other school functions are taken away from students whose attendance is below 90 percent.

The focus on attendance was due to a combined absence and truancy rate of around a third of students (particularly amongst Māori and Pākehā) in 2009.

The following expectations underpin enhanced Māori student achievement within HGHS:

- students need to be at school and in class to learn
- all students have potential that can be realised when they receive appropriate support to take responsibility and be accountable
- teachers are passionate about learning and engage effectively to teach all students, particularly Māori students
- school-wide approaches reflect Māori as tangata whenua and facilitate cultural activity
- Māori students are offered a range of opportunities to broaden their horizons and to experience success
- the school curriculum reflects the aspirations of the local Māori whānau and wider community.

The school's goals have developed over time and are fuelled by the principal's high expectations of teachers and students, and supported by the SLM team and BOT. The following table outlines a number of key goals that reinforce expectations.

**TABLE 1** Key expectations and the goals that support them

Expectation	Goals that support each expectation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students need to be at school and in class to learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>high level of student attendance</li> <li>engagement in learning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All students have potential that can be realised when they receive appropriate support to take responsibility and become accountable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>each student to achieve at personal best</li> <li>professional learning communities within staff</li> <li>110 staff each supporting approximately 15 students, as their mentor</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are passionate about learning and engage effectively to teach all students, particularly Māori students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>all students can/will achieve</li> <li>teachers are lifelong learners</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>School-wide approaches reflect Māori as tangata whenua and facilitate cultural activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>collaboration with kaumātua, whānau, rōpū</li> <li>kapa haka is available</li> <li>Māori student leadership and feedback</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Māori students are offered a range of opportunities to broaden their horizons and to experience success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Māori mentoring</li> <li>whānau classes</li> <li>valuing involvement and successes in sport, arts and cultural activities and service as well as with academic learning is seen as integral to developing self-belief and success</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school curriculum reflects the aspirations of the local Māori whānau and wider community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>development of relevant subjects</li> <li>timetabling and individual course design (100-minute classes and NCEA courses)</li> </ul>

**Expectations clearly linked to school goals**

**School-wide target is for each student to achieve her personal best**

The overall school-wide target is for each student to achieve her personal best. The principal has high expectations of school staff and works closely with the SLM team and teaching staff, engaging in a variety of professional conversations focusing on learner engagement and achievement. The school uses formal assessment tools, critical inquiry and effectiveness reporting to capture timely information on student progress and ability. This information informs the development of targets and enables the most appropriate support to be provided.

For each year group, level assessment data are analysed for Māori students. This analysis is fed back to the teaching staff and then fed forward into classroom and curriculum planning. There is recognition of the need to keep improving Māori achievement and maintain teacher responsiveness to Māori learners.

All staff, including support staff, have high expectations of Māori students and understand the importance of getting to know students and building positive relationships. Māori student academic and social learning is a responsibility that all school staff share, including the support staff, through their involvement as mentors in the tutor group mentoring. The school has a strong culture of supporting each student to achieve; to be the best they can be. As the data show, student achievement for Māori varies from year to year but appears to be trending upwards. Furthermore, there are few students leaving HGHS with little or no formal attainment.

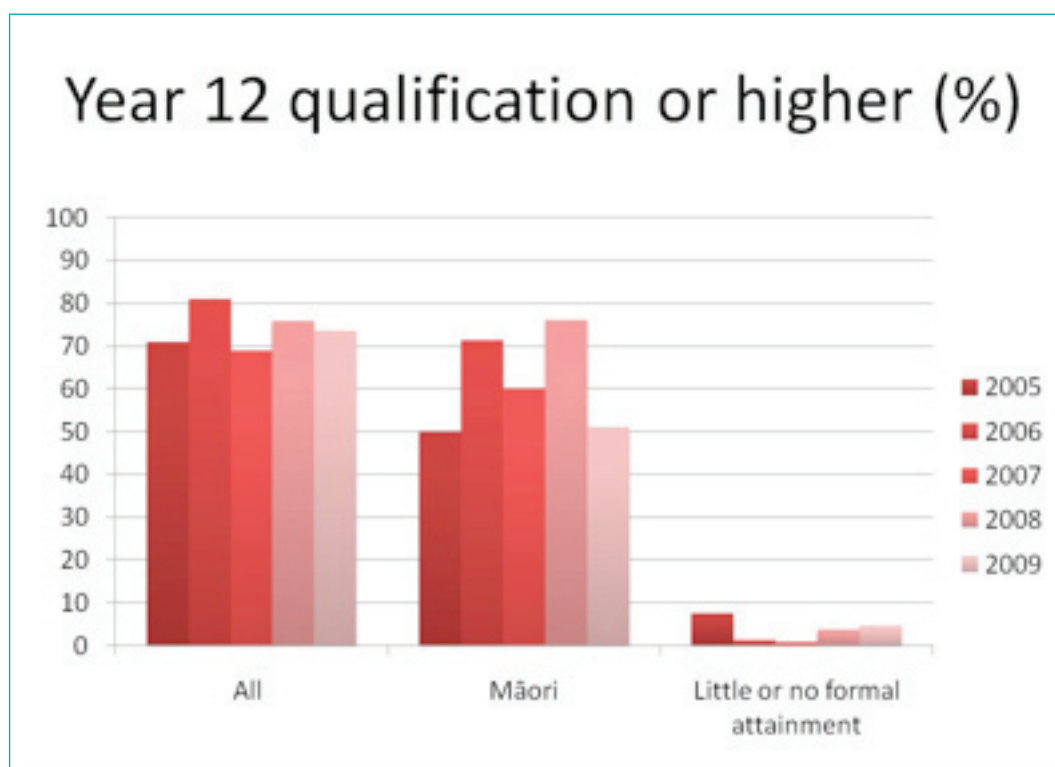


Māori student achievement higher than for similar schools

Student diaries encourage self-evaluation and self-reporting

School-wide mentoring builds positive relationships with students

FIGURE 1 Students leaving with Year 12 qualification or higher



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

Students are expected to show competencies in a number of areas so they become resilient, self-sufficient graduates. Student diaries encourage self-evaluation and self-reporting on individual progress in a number of areas, including attendance, contributing and participating, completing work on time, managing self, punctuality, effort and quality of learning. Areas of success and areas to work on are recorded by the students and in a similar fashion to the teachers they are also asked to feed forward, “What will you do in the next fortnight?”

Students are encouraged to take the lead in situations where they can use their own knowledge to inform the class (such as drama). Students report that teachers create good environments in which to learn, and that classroom content is suitably pitched relative to student ability and therefore made achievable:

*They [teachers] encourage us a lot when we do achieve something, therefore it makes us want to achieve more. [Student]*

*My teachers always encourage me to succeed well with advice and tips. My graphics teacher always looks in me to improve the quality of my work with tutorials and one-on-one conversations. [Student]*

The principal has been instrumental in the recent introduction of a school-wide mentoring model where three times a week for 20 minutes two staff members (including support staff) meet as mentors with their vertical tutor group.<sup>1</sup> This mentoring model is based on Robyn Cox’s mentoring model and training.<sup>2</sup> Specifically, one mentor works with the Year 9 and Year 10 students while the other mentor works alongside students in Years 11–13. The role of the mentor is to be a “significant adult”—often the first contact between home and school, making regular contact with whānau. On a day-to-day basis the mentors are expected to build a positive relationship with the students, identify any issues or challenges to student learning, discuss strategies to help the girls gain confidence, talk about setting goals, monitor their students’ goals and progress and follow up where absences are an issue.

# Resourcing strategically to enhance Māori student achievement

**Critical inquiry process underpins teaching and learning**

**Māori mentoring to improve Māori student success**

**Vertical tutor groups support students as Māori**

**Whānau and the Māori community have played a key role in the school**

Teaching strategies and resources align effectively with the goals of enhancing Māori learners. The critical inquiry process is one where all staff are expected to work with one or more self-selected partners to interrogate a question they have in common about their own practice. This action research process seeks to make a positive difference to students' learning and achievement. For instance, the school resourced a Māori mentoring programme—an initiative that came out of Māori staff's critical inquiry process.

The Māori mentoring programme was specifically developed to improve Māori student success. In conversation with the whānau group, HGHS implemented the programme in 2007—shoulder-tapping students who the teachers identified needed extra support and encouragement to reach their personal best. As the programme has developed, it has become more popular and a selection process has been established. Selected students work closely with the Māori mentoring staff throughout the year, developing goals in areas of taha tinana (physical wellbeing), taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing), taha hinengaro (mental or psychological wellbeing) and taha aronganui (emotional wellbeing). Whānau are encouraged to be involved and are informed of their daughter's progress throughout the year. A celebration evening completes the programme at the end of the year.

The principal and SLM team have resourced teaching and learning environments that support students "as Māori" (in Māori terms) and encourage their personal development and success. Whānau classes were first introduced in the school in 2001 and provide whānau and their daughters with an option at the time of enrolment to participate in a vertical tutor group that is based in the school's wharenuī. Whānau classes incorporate tikanga Māori with the use of karakia (prayer), waiata (song) and te reo Māori. The majority of whānau class mentors (five of the six) are Māori and they include two members of the SLM team. Whānau classes are an important part of the school routines. Teachers, whānau and Māori students acknowledge how critical the whānau classes are in facilitating Māori students to participate as Māori, through such activities as karakia and waiata:

*Whānau is just Māori and I feel safe and comfortable. We get to do things that matter to us.*

[Student]

*They acknowledge you in whānau, acknowledge you in assembly, watch your sport and watch you perform.* [Student]

Students noted that the whānau classes were "a better learning environment ... [which] give a sense of community that supports us in other learning and things that are happening in the school".

Over the past five years the school has resourced and increased the number of vertical whānau classes available for any Māori students and whānau who are interested. As a reflection of the success of the whānau tutor groups the model was implemented school-wide from 2008; and the whole school adopted vertical tutor groups reflecting tuakana-teina (big sister-little sister) concepts, coupled with the mentoring model based on Robyn Cox's mentoring training in 2010 (as discussed earlier).

The school has made provision for the whānau group to be active within the school, with a particular focus on raising Māori student achievement. Whānau and the Māori community have played a key role in the school for a number of years and have directly influenced school development and priorities. From as early as 2001 whānau have contributed to the improvement of Māori achievement through involvement in active working parties, developing policy and goals for the school. Kaumātua advice is sought on a regular basis and the direction provided is highly appreciated by the principal and SLM team. The extension of the whānau classes from one to three was a direct result of the need expressed by whānau.



The principal and teaching staff understand the significance of their location on Tainui whenua and strive to embrace tainuitanga through acknowledging kingitanga, powhiri protocols and involving Māori community in the lives of the students. The principal, SLM team members and teachers are involved in the conversations with whānau. The school has provided a whareniui (meeting place) and wharekai (kitchen) that are used frequently by Māori students. It provides a space that they feel comfortable in, recreating a sense of whānau and togetherness:

*It's a comfort zone for us, we sleep there, eat there, it feels like home. [Student]*

Māori staff play key roles in the school as deputy principal, head of department/teacher in charge lead learning coaches, mentors, and in sports and kapa haka. There are a number of ways that teachers are supported to engage Māori students in learning. Māori teachers in the school play a critical role in supporting non-Māori to develop appropriate responses to students and build effective relationships. For example, one way that Māori teachers provide assistance is through supporting others to pronounce Māori names correctly.

A number of school routines maximise Māori students' opportunities to learn, and the school offers homework clubs and runs call-back sessions during holidays for students to complete any missed work. The school has modified its timetable and provides 100-minute classroom sessions that allow students time for more in-depth learning. The school routines are also effective in assisting teachers to build improved relationships with their students. The school holds regular events for Māori students, including a careers day and Wahine Māori celebration. Kapa haka is acknowledged as a critical part of Māori student learning and is part of unit standards. There is a budget line for it, allowing for extra support with tutoring.

The school provides pastoral care in the school in a manner that includes components of restorative practices, which allow for whānau involvement. Pastoral care and support systems are based on restorative justice with clear boundaries, consequences for action and consistency and fairness. Peer mediation and support occurs where senior students who have taken on leadership roles, such as being involved in Ka Awatea, the Māori Student Council,<sup>3</sup> meet with a student to help resolve a particular issue. Whānau support and knowledge are sought kanohi ki te kanohi (face to face) in situations where students may be having difficulties at school, and whānau appreciate being included and informed at all times.

The Hillary Centre is a resource that offers students a place for time out from a particular class where there may be issues. With support from guidance staff and whānau, a plan is then developed with the student, outlining a pathway for them to integrate back into a class. The school has a strengths-based focus, acknowledging the successes of its students as a way to promote confidence and increased good behaviour. Currently there are plans to develop a Restorative Action Group, which will include student involvement.

The school places emphasis on resourcing professional development and supports lifelong learning for teachers. Professional development is a key component in the school and provides good information on best practice, with topics such as, "How to show students they are being listened to and teachers are trying". Teachers also noted the support of kaumātua as an important component for learning about the needs of Māori students:

*He has been fantastic in giving support to so many of the staff, even on a personal level ... He has a way that breaks down any barriers or defences that teachers may have. [Teacher]*

All school staff support the school-home partnerships through a range of communications to whānau and allow opportunities for them to provide feedback. During 2010, through the tutor class mentoring, each student's whānau was contacted via phone at least two times in each term. Calls were made by the tutor group mentors—as a way of brokering relationships, providing regular feedback on the student, following up on any concerns (such as attendance) and sharing successes. The school has resourced a new online booking system that was implemented in 2009 to organise parent-teacher interviews with follow-up phone calls or emails from teachers if they had not heard from parents or caregivers. Early in the second term, use of this system helped achieve a record number of 3,500 parent-teacher interviews during a "Parent Conversation Day" where students and parents came in throughout the evening and following day.

**School routines maximise Māori students' opportunities to learn**

**Pastoral care and support systems are based on restorative justice with clear boundaries**

**School-home partnerships are encouraged through a range of communications**

# Ensuring quality of teaching and the curriculum to support Māori student achievement

Regular monitoring of student performance

The principal of HGHS, with the support of the SLM team and teaching staff, methodically monitor student performance through a feedback/feedforward system across all year levels. This assists in the planning of a curriculum that is both responsive to student needs, and with a particular emphasis on providing interest for Māori.

## PART A: ENSURING CURRICULUM QUALITY

Māori achievement data are widely reported within the school to staff and also to whānau at whānau group hui. Results help to guide curriculum planning as well as other strategies in the school to improve attendance, engagement and achievement. The principal and SLM team have embraced the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum* and incorporated these throughout the school—communicating the benefits of these to teaching staff, whānau and students. Each curriculum subject is reported on in the school newsletter. Ka Awatea, the Māori Student Council, also provides a report with an invitation to the next whānau hui.

A range of formal assessment tools are used

Formal assessment tools including midYIS, asTTle, critical teaching inquiry, NCEA data, daily attendance reports and variance effectiveness reports are employed in the school to monitor the success of each student. Mentors connect and monitor the progress of students each week, realising that everything links to the engagement and achievement of the student in a range of areas.

Students are expected to do their personal best and are challenged to extend themselves in all areas including academic, sporting, arts and cultural, and service arenas. Students felt that teachers do not give up on them just because they're Māori and there are many opportunities for them to experience new and exciting things. Each year there is an awards night for Māori and Pacifica students which celebrates a range of achievement and success (not only academic success). The Māori mentoring programme builds on the students' strengths, helping them to reach their full potential. Students acknowledge that the school's focus on achievement makes them want to do well and teachers make an effort to help students believe in themselves and their abilities:

*They encourage us to try everything even if we've never done it before.* [Student]

*They provide us with the information we need to learn and recognise our strengths and achievements.* [Student]

*It is serendipitous but important that a number of Māori are in the student leadership group ... it is important that students get to see a brown face.* [BOT member]

Regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching strategies

Through ongoing critical inquiry, action research and the yearly effectiveness reports the school collects relevant information on how, as lead learners, teachers have developed self-sufficient learners, how the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum* have been embedded in their teaching and how they have engaged with Māori students. Teachers evaluate their teaching and their learners' development in weekly lead-learning (learning area/department) meetings attended by SLM staff. Professional conversations between teachers, the SLM team and principal help to ensure that contexts and content of courses and learning and teaching approaches are relevant to diverse learners. The introduction of 100-minute classes once in a 10-day cycle has supported teachers to cater to the learning needs of students, meet their differentiated learning needs and help them increase their understanding of a topic.

**Ways the curriculum is adapted to interest Māori students**

**Māori teachers have a pivotal role**

**Professional learning communities share the pastoral care**

There is a culture of evaluation and inquiry in the school where the focus is on progress of students and the school. For students who are struggling, support is offered through restorative practices with input from whānau. In addition, students may participate in the Māori mentoring programme for extra assistance. The school attempts to teach strategies in moving through difficult situations, to deal with challenges and work towards personal success. Since the introduction of the tutor group mentoring model, support staff also participate in the monitoring of student achievement:

*It's not about rescuing; it's about teaching strategies and skills that will prepare them for the world outside of school. [SLM team member]*

To maintain the interest of Māori students in English, a te reo Pākehā English course was developed focusing on New Zealand Māori authors and stories related to Māori. This course is popular and well attended by Māori students. Cultural components are added in other courses such as art and drama and include inviting Māori guest artists into the classroom, making putiputi harakeke (flax weaving) and poi. In Year 12, Māori students take a lead in tikanga and peer support throughout the school. Teachers are expected to obtain feedback from their students and encourage the student voice by asking direct questions about the learning they are receiving—both the positive as well as areas for development. According to individual ability and skill, Māori students are encouraged to undertake curriculum that both extends and reflects their knowledge. For example, Year 10 students undertake NCEA Level 2 in te reo Māori where appropriate.

The starting point for engaging Māori students in all classes is talking and listening to them and showing respect in order to build reciprocal relationships. All staff are aware of the importance of building relationships with the students—getting to know the girls and their contexts. Strategies used include name games, use of whānau photos to engage with students and the teachers modelling asking for help. For example, teachers might ask a student for help to learn to pronounce their name correctly.

## **PART B: ENSURING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING**

Māori teachers are pivotal in assisting HGHS to respond effectively to Māori students and whānau. They have provided specific help to develop te reo and correct pronunciation in the school. The school frequently calls on the expertise of the kaumātua and the kaumātua has excellent relationships with teachers. The whānau class mentors are accessible to teachers when a student is faced with any difficulties, and transferring a student to the whānau class is a viable option when whānau and student see the benefits to student wellbeing:

*Teachers look for advice and support to build relationships with their Māori students, to learn more about their lives. There is a transfer of skills happening from Māori teachers to others. [Teacher]*

Professional learning communities have developed within the school which require the teachers to constantly review their teaching, personal learning journey and what supports they require. The pastoral system in place and the use of the Hillary Centre enables students and teachers to gain time out from each other when there is an issue or conflict within class. A number of restorative processes can take place including peer support/mediation with a senior student and hui with whānau.

The SLM team, pastoral staff and Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) provide support to teachers who may be having difficulty assisting their Māori students. In one example, the RTLB worked closely with a teacher whose students had continually low results and attendance, particularly Māori students. The teacher was guided and supported through an individual professional development process, examining their own teaching style, what worked and what could be improved. The process evolved to include students giving the teacher constructive feedback as to how they found the class sessions, and possible areas for improvement.

Appraisal of teaching staff and students focuses on improving teaching practice and, ultimately, student outcomes. Throughout each structure in the school is an evaluative component that requires critical analysis, learning for those involved and improvements going forward. Critical inquiry is a continuous improvement cycle where teachers give feedback to each other and feedforward. Everything that occurs in the school, including formal assessment data analysis, is used to improve teaching and enhance learning:

*At HGHS we respect the significance and relevance of regular use of formative data to support our students' progress—we do not just rely on summative data. Formative data assist us in an ongoing way.* [Principal]

*Critical inquiry provides a space to have a professional relationship with the students.* [Teacher]

Data assessment is used to drive school targets and goals and reinforces key teaching principles including: resist the temptation to tell; lead students to the final product; problems first—teaching second. Student voice is encouraged to provide feedback to teachers. This is gained through Ka Awatea, critical inquiry by the teaching staff and student surveys.



# Teacher learning and development to enhance Māori student achievement

**Māori student achievement data drive professional learning and development programmes**

**Outside expertise regularly sought as well as drawing on internal expertise**

**Communities of learning underpin development of relationships between teaching staff**

**Teachers constantly challenged to find better ways to engage with students**

Māori student achievement data have been collected and analysed for a number of years, as a direct result of Māori student achievement policies established in the school. This information is considered in the context of not only how students can be supported but also how teachers can support and learn with each other. Teachers are given the opportunity to put forward their ideas about what professional development is needed for them to achieve their teaching goals.

Māori student learning is a key focus within the school. The principal and SLM team, alongside the teaching staff, realise the disparities in academic achievement for Māori within the education system and work consistently towards improving academic results. The deputy principal responsible for leading pastoral and guidance support works closely with a whānau, student and teaching staff working party focused on improving Māori achievement. To engage Māori students in learning, whānau tutor group classes, te reo Pākehā English course and feedback from students in class and from their student diaries are used. Teaching staff work with relentless focus towards raising achievement amongst Māori students. Professional conversations in the school are driven by student engagement, achievement and the need for teachers to model learning themselves by engaging in lifelong learning, through reading, talking, evaluating and planning for more effective learning and teaching strategies. One of the principles of professional development is that teachers strive to be the best they can be to support student engagement and achievement. The principal offers a range of up-to-date thinking and readings relevant to teaching 21st century learners. Expert information from leaders in professional development and adolescent development, including Maggie Dent,<sup>4</sup> have been instrumental in informing HGHS staff. Year 13 students and staff together participated in a one-day Everybody Matters Initiative with Maggie Dent and were taken through a positive school visioning process. A day was set aside for each year level to participate throughout a week.

The principal is focused on professional development within the school as a way to enhance teaching and learning. There has also been an emphasis on establishing professional learning communities:

*It's important to hook teachers into learning; [to] support them to become researchers of their own practice ... [It's] a chance to chew the fat and if we can investigate our own responsibilities then we can and will make a difference to our students. [Principal]*

HGHS is a large school with more than 100 teaching staff and more than 40 support staff as well as 30 hostel staff, an expanding student roll and students representing more than 50 different ethnicities and cultures. In the context of the school, teacher learning and development are also about enhancing relationships between staff—who, due to the large numbers, may not know each other or have not worked together before. The professional learning community is based on strategic visioning involving the principal, SLM team and teaching staff.

The principal, SLM team and lead learning coaches and teaching staff participate in interdisciplinary focus groups using reflective journals and portfolios, and sharing professional readings and dialogue. A significant component of the teacher learning and development is critical inquiry action research where teachers are encouraged to ask the key question, “What positive impact has there been on student learning and achievement?”

Professional learning communities have been developed that continually challenge teaching staff to think outside of what they know and reassess how they may be doing things in the classroom. Teaching the students is a serious occupation, not to be undertaken lightly. Teachers are expected to bring their very best to the classroom situation and take responsibility for their development and never become complacent about their own skills and abilities to teach:

*As a school we are always looking to what we are doing ... we are mindful of Māori achievement and our responsibilities and obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi. [SLM team member]*

**Range of  
assessment  
tools used**

*We are encouraged to think about how we teach. There are high expectations, lots of critical inquiry and readings to support teaching practices. [Teacher]*

Regular staff meetings, professional conversations, critical inquiry, student feedback and formal assessment tools such as midYIS, and NCEA data all provide evidence of how effectively teachers are teaching their students. Regular discussion with parents and caregivers also provides relevant feedback to teachers about any challenges the student is facing or whānau are experiencing (such as, getting the student to school and completion of homework). Professional development in the school focuses on the impact of teaching on all students. Professional development is about the teachers becoming lifelong learners themselves and, through their own passion and desire to learn, inspiring the students to extend their own learning:

*It is about helping the teacher to understand not only the impact they have on students but also to investigate and gain knowledge of what the actual impact is. It's not enough to say I will teach subject content. There is an expectation that teachers will be able to identify what the students gained, the added value for students by being in the classroom. [Principal]*



# Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment for Māori students

**Development of small student communities within the wider school community**

The principal and SLM team have facilitated the development of small student communities within the wider school community. This helps to create a sense of belonging for the students, particularly those who are a minority. Student groups such as Ka Awatea, Pacifika and Indian student club help to ensure the student voice is heard. Established routines within the school, such as daily whānau tutor classes, create a comfortable space for Māori students.

Staff views about the school culture and how to improve it are taken seriously to enhance Māori learner achievement. Māori teachers in the school are encouraged to express their views and their assistance has led to improved pronunciation, as well as helping to build relationships between teachers and students:

*I feel I can go and talk with lots of teachers, even the principal, if I have any problems or even ideas about what we would like to do. [Student]*

**House system promotes school spirit and motivation**

HGHS uses a house system to promote school spirit and motivation amongst the students to get involved in the school. Students enjoy participating in house events, making banners to support each other and taking part to gain points for their house. The principal provides rewards for student participation and attendance as well as for teacher involvement. Rewards include movie tickets for classes with highest attendance, the chance to win an iPod for excellent attendance, and goodie bags for teachers:

*Students are now telling other students to come to athletics or swimming days. The responsibility has shifted to the girls through their own choice and they are the motivators. [Principal]*

**Consistent approaches to behaviour management**

The school has consistent approaches to behaviour management, which are presented in the *Student, Staff, Parent Manual*. These include focusing on the preferred way forward with privileges earned for good attendance, high-quality work and timeliness, as well as consequences for poor attendance, incompleteness of work or breaches of school rules. Restorative processes include options such as a teacher meeting a student at lunchtime to talk through a problem, a peer mediator meeting with students to resolve issues, the dean or deputy principal meeting with a student and teacher to facilitate a resolution, or the counsellor or deputy principal facilitating a family conference. In the case of serious issues, a formal restorative conference takes place. Suspensions are the last resort, only used after exhausting a number of other options, including behaviour contracts or community service (such as cleaning).

**Hillary Centre, peer mediation, dean support and restorative hui help to resolve problems between teachers and Māori students**

The Hillary Centre, peer mediation, dean support and restorative hui help to resolve problems between teachers and Māori students in a fair and timely way. The Hillary Centre is used to give students and teachers time out from each other during any difficulties. Pastoral staff contact whānau if a student is removed from a class to a time-out room based in the Hillary Centre. The student may spend a few weeks not attending a particular class if there are issues. The student will still participate in other classes and school events. During time out, a plan to reintegrate a student back to the class is developed with the support of whānau.

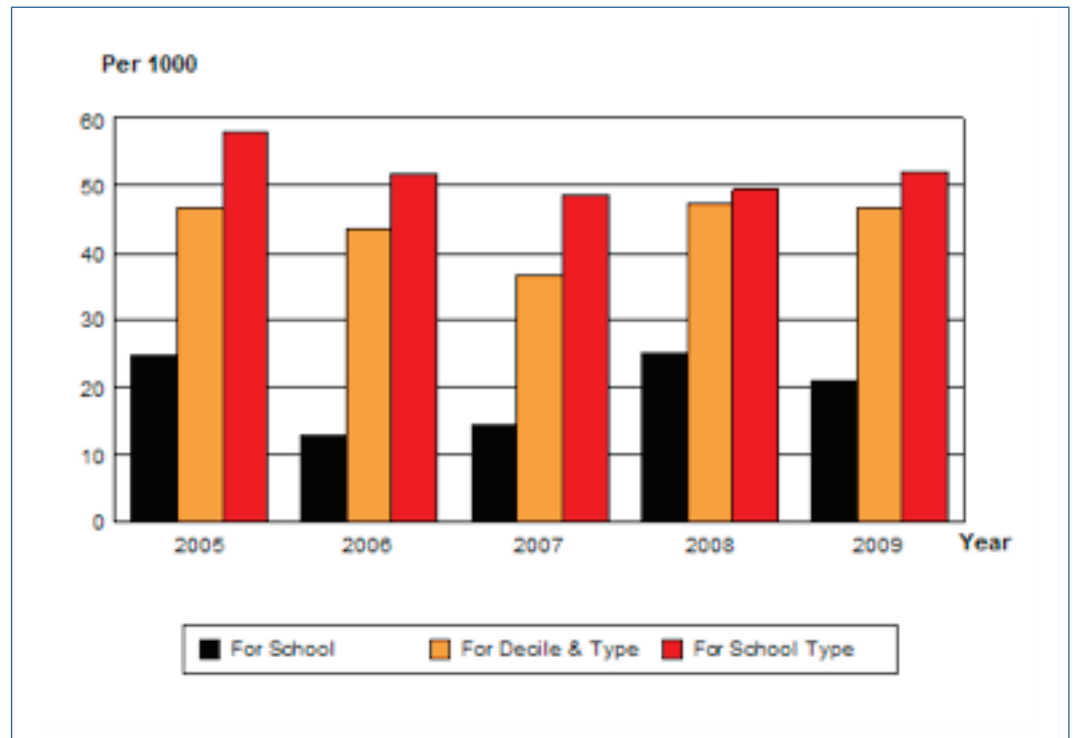
As the following figures show, HGHS does not use stand-downs or suspensions often. Statistics for these are consistent over the past five years, and are well below other schools of a similar profile. Meanwhile, suspensions have declined over the same period. The principal has been known to tell students that it is quite difficult to get suspended from HGHS as the SLM team “doesn’t give up on students”.

Stand-downs or suspensions not used often

SLM team sends a message that it “doesn’t give up on students”

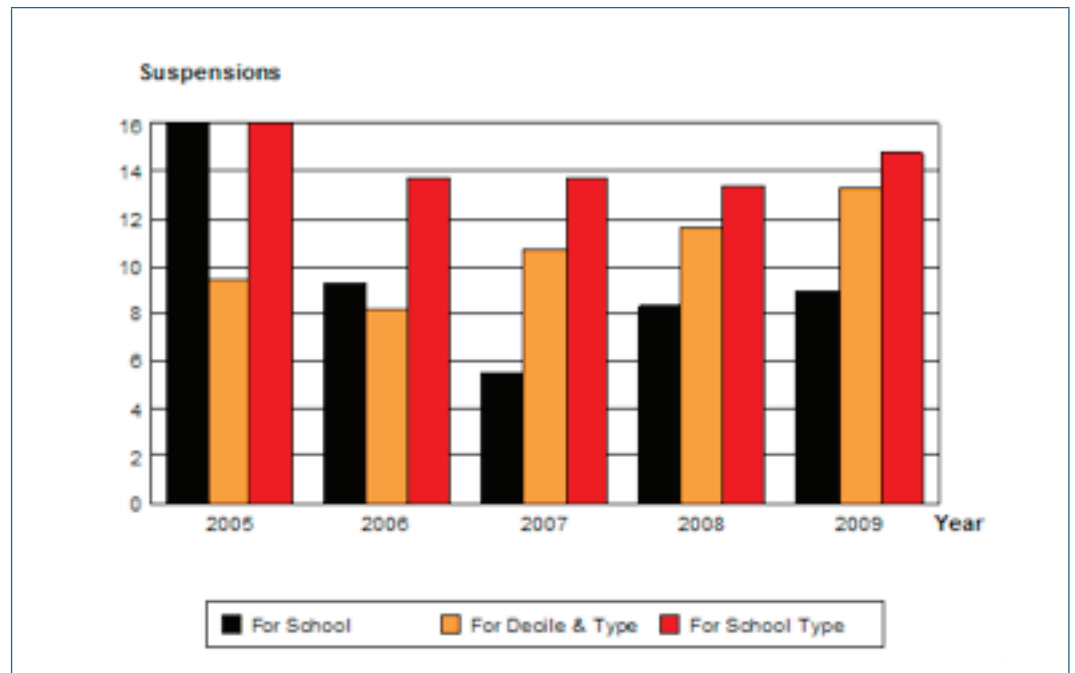
Māori students have a voice in Ka Awatea, the Māori Student Council

**FIGURE 2** Stand-down rates at HGHS per 1,000 students



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

**FIGURE 3** Suspension rates at HGHS per 1,000 students



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

Ka Awatea meets regularly and is encouraged to discuss any issues and talk with the principal. For example, students proposed increased engagement with a neighbouring school, to which the principal agreed. Students and whānau all spoke highly of the school and the high expectations that are placed on them to learn and achieve. Students feel valued in the school and say their contribution as Māori is acknowledged through the number of opportunities to come together as Māori to learn and celebrate (for example, Wahine Māori day, Māori careers event, Ka Awatea, kapa haka, whānau classes). Whānau feel that Māori are visible in the school and represented amongst teachers and student leadership roles (for example, the 2010 head girl was Māori):

*When I was considering the school I walked through with my daughter and the visibility of Māori was affirming, from the honours board to the conversation I had with the deputy principal.*  
[Whānau]

# Making educationally powerful connections with Māori whānau and the community supports Māori student achievement

Regular contact with whānau to discuss student progress through the tutor group mentoring model

All staff including the principal, SLM team, teachers and support staff contact whānau regularly to discuss student progress through the tutor group mentoring model. This contact occurs via a friendly phone call and is effective in brokering relationships with the large number of parents associated with students at the school. Whānau rōpū meets with teachers (generally Māori), students, the principal and SLM team on a regular basis. At these hui, whānau receive feedback on Māori student assessment results, the vision of the school and the underlying philosophies of the school. Efforts are made to help whānau understand *The New Zealand Curriculum* and how that translates into classroom practice.

Teaching staff encourage whānau to support their children through promoting involvement in kapa haka, whānau rōpū discussions, parent–teacher interview nights and attendance at school events. The principal produces a regular newsletter/pānui to keep all parents and caregivers up to date with what is happening at the school.

The principal or SLM team present NCEA achievement data to whānau, including clear information about where Māori are within the school. However, the principal is less inclined to present comparisons with national benchmarks as the focus within the school supports the students to be the best they can be. The cohort's value-added data (midYis) are seen as a more rigorous and relevant way to examine each group's progress and achievement.

The school has been responsive to Māori whānau and values their contribution to the school's development. Whānau classes were originally established because of whānau aspirations and then were extended to three classes because of the need expressed by whānau. Currently the whānau rōpū is focusing on improving Māori achievement. All whānau concerns are taken seriously and where there may be different views of the optimal solution (for example, regarding kapa haka or waiata) the principal calls on the expert advice from kaumātua, Māori staff and whānau.

Systematic processes for gaining Māori whānau and Māori community feedback about the school include whānau rōpū involvement, kaumātua contact and regular contact between teaching staff and whānau as well as whānau surveys.

At the beginning of the year the kaumātua engages with all Year 13 students to facilitate an understanding of Māori culture at HGHS. Whānau say that the school has an open-door policy and the principal is willing to listen to them and have discussions with them. The principal's efforts to gain whānau feedback are highly appreciated:

*[The principal and SLM team] have used an inclusive model and are responsive to Māori. [The principal] is a good leader and takes the time to learn what works and why. [Whānau]*

*It is a good school. There are many systems in place to support our kids and the girls have some excellent role models in the form of Māori teachers in the school ... the school nurtures the development of leadership. [Whānau]*

The school works in partnership with local Māori leaders to support Māori aspirations. Kaumātua guidance features highly in the school—from the development of the whareniui through to advice to teaching staff and kapa haka involvement. Tainuitanga is both respected and acknowledged—reflecting the location of the school on Tainui whenua.

School responsive to Māori whānau and values their contribution

School works in partnership with local Māori leaders to support Māori aspirations

# Engaging in constructive problem talk enhances Māori student achievement

Principal an enthusiastic advocate for ongoing learning

Principal genuine and authentic in her relationships with staff, whānau and students

Principal passionate about education and success for Māori students

All decisions in the school are based on best practice research and the latest educational thinking on supporting learners in the 21st century. The principal is an enthusiastic advocate for ongoing learning and development and is always challenging HGHS staff to improve their learning and teaching practices with the “learner as the central focus”.

The principal introduces staff to key concepts in education and is involved in all professional conversations. Along with SLM team support, the principal has embedded a culture of professional development and she takes the lead by introducing key concepts in education, getting teachers to participate in regular reading and introducing systems in the school:

*[The principal] supports the staff and if we do something in the school so does she ... there is always plenty of discussion and chances for teaching staff to give their opinions. [Teacher]*

The principal investigates what other schools are engaging in and how those systems could serve the interests of the school. An example of this is the vertical tutor class format. Schools using this system were visited and staff experiences of vertical forms were obtained. The principal led staff consultation on the benefits and challenges of the vertical form approach before it was adopted school-wide.

The principal is firm but fair and attempts to resolve all conflicts quickly. If there are issues with school systems, the principal looks to work with the staff and implement changes to accommodate teachers’ concerns.

The principal is professional in all her dealings with staff, whānau and students. She continuously promotes the values of the school by expecting the very best from herself and working hard towards success:

*There is a good, positive environment in the school to consider and promote everyone’s achievements. [Teacher]*

*The school’s ethos is underpinned by understanding the girls’ development, their lives and the impact of challenges for them ... Expectations are high and there are many opportunities available to succeed. [Teacher]*

The principal is honest and has learned to be upfront about her own challenges in situations. For example, she was aware that her Māori pronunciation was not particularly good at times and this kept her away from attending whānau rōpū in the past. This caused some conflict as whānau thought she was disengaged. By being honest with whānau, both parties reached a new level of understanding that helped find a way forward:

*The principal is not afraid to say she doesn’t have the answers. Instead she has fronted up and talked about her concerns openly and genuinely asks for advice. [Whānau]*

The principal is seen as determined, knowledgeable and passionate about education. Māori respect her drive and the care that she shows for Māori students. Whānau are appreciative of the lengths the principal goes to involve them in decision making (for example, employment of staff):

*In the time I have been involved with the school [the principal] has been respectful ... I feel I have had opportunities to be involved not just in my own daughter’s education but decisions that could potentially impact on other students’ lives as well. [Whānau]*

Senior leadership, teaching staff and BOT respect the principal and the effort and commitment shown towards raising the achievement of all students in the school. The principal does not underestimate the considerable goodwill of HGHS staff that has facilitated change and successful developments in the school:

*None of this would have happened without a passionate, totally committed staff who care so much about each girl engaging and succeeding. This is done by a staff (teaching, support and hostel) who have worked way beyond what I could ask of them—they have gifted this commitment to the school and the girls in particular. [Principal]*



## SELECTING, DEVELOPING AND USING SMART TOOLS TO ENHANCE MĀORI STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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The principal and staff of HGHS regularly use formal assessment tools, including midYIS and asTTle, to monitor the progress of each student. Coupling this with critical teaching inquiry, in-depth analysis of NCEA data, close monitoring of daily attendance reports and paying attention to variance effectiveness reports, the school has an effective toolkit to check student engagement and focus on maximising student potential and achievement.

### FURTHER READINGS

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The research team is grateful to the time and contribution of both students and whānau who spoke with them and trusted that their experiences within the school would be represented accurately. Students engaged in the research process with maturity and expressed their hopes that their own successful experiences would improve education for Māori throughout Aotearoa.

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### (FOOTNOTES)

- 1 A vertical tutor group is one that has students from more than one year level in it—in this case it includes Years 9–13 students.
- 2 See <http://mentoring.net.nz/aboutus/founders.cfm>
- 3 Ka Awatea is a Māori Student Council within the school that provides excellent opportunities for students to develop their leadership qualities.
- 4 For more on Maggie Dent, go to <http://www.maggiedent.com/>



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