



CASE STUDY 6

TALENTED AND INSPIRED LEADERSHIP THE KEY TO EDUCATION SUCCESS

Talk to staff at Te Kopuru School in Northland and they'll emphatically agree that the country's English-medium schools are ideal places to foster Māori education success – just look at their example.

For the past eight years, under the leadership of Pākehā principal Lee Anderson, the small rural school of 130 children has undergone a process of slow but steady change.

The aim: to respond to the community's call to improve the education, social and cultural outcomes of the school's Māori learners who make up around 65% of the learner population.

Lee has introduced a new vision centred around the Māori principles of tika (things that are right), pono (the truth) and aroha (loving openness). Everyday school practices now

comprise kapa haka, hīmene, mihi and waiata – and involve everyone in leadership roles regardless of ethnicity.

Teachers continue to participate in training to improve the way literacy, numeracy and te reo Māori are taught and to improve their use of information communication technology (ICT).

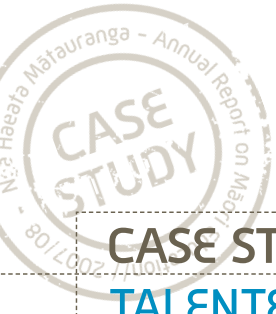
Involving whānau in the life of the school is now commonplace. The school's bilingual unit, Poutama, has extended the proficiency levels taught in the last few years, too.

In 2008, Te Kopuru became the lead school in the four-year Extending High Standards Across Schools programme, which recognises and aims to share effective practice.



((...new vision centred around the Māori principles of tika, pono and aroha))

Te Kopuru School principal Lee Anderson and teachers Pere Tahere (Ngāpuhi) and Karen Matich.



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Today, there is more opportunity than ever at Te Kopuru School to learn te reo Māori and through te reo Māori and to grow up with a sense of being Māori.

Teacher Pere Tahere explains: “This school, like the education system overall, is changing for the better. And, when you see what’s happening for Māori, the change is bigger and better still. We’ve enabled children to feel happy and comfortable being Māori here.

“When I grew up, my identity and culture were compromised. I knew the reo but I was distanced from it. I can remember being told to go outside when our mums, dads and aunties communicated in te reo Māori. We used to sit under the windows just to hear it.

“Nowadays our juniors are first in line to do karakia in the morning – they’re just so proud. They love standing up there and performing. They do it so beautifully to the great credit of their teachers,” says Pere.

Lee says the changes at Te Kopuru School reflect the wants of her community as well as the education sector’s growing understanding about the importance of language, culture and identity and the impact both can have on learner achievement.

She says the correlation between culture and achievement is clearly visible at her school.

Assessment data for 2007 shows 77% of the school’s Māori learners are spelling at or above the expected level for their age, with 80% the figure for Māori learners in Poutama, the school’s bilingual unit. Reading data for 2007 show similar results.

Data show a 24% jump in the number of Māori learners spelling at or above the expected level for their age since 2006. They also show Poutama students are achieving at rates that are 12% higher than their non-Māori peers.

Writing data for 2007 also shows good progress across all student groups, particularly the Poutama students, 62% of whom are writing at or above the expected level for their age. Meanwhile, numeracy data shows 61% of Māori learners are achieving at or above their expected level.

Lee says that the overall achievement trends are heartening when she thinks back to 2000, the year she started at Te Kopuru and began to step up the school’s focus on Māori learners.

“Yet,” she says, “the past eight years haven’t been easy. Losing talented and skilled staff to greener pastures is an ongoing challenge. Over the past few years some teachers have left rather than change. At times, members of the community have been resistant, too.”

Teacher Karen Matich agrees: “A lot of our non-Māori parents felt worried their kids would miss out – that we were becoming a Māori-only school. But they’ve come to see that’s not the case. They can see what we’re doing is raising the achievement of all our students,” says Karen.

“In fact, now we’re finding our parents are educating the wider community about what we’re doing – they’re saying: ‘Look it’s working!’”

Karen says in many ways the last eight years have been about continuing to improve teaching practice across the board – something that’s beneficial to all students.

Setting up five-year-olds with a strong foundation in literacy and numeracy skills has been a major focus. Helping learners transition from early childhood education to primary school and from primary to secondary school is another important focus area.

Thinking about the major influence over the past few years, Pere and Karen are quick to say: “Leadership – talented and inspired leadership.”