

# Your child's education

Learning opportunities in New Zealand



## Who is this booklet for?

This booklet gives parents, families and **whānau** an overview of education in New Zealand, from early childhood education through to secondary school.

The information will be useful if you are new to New Zealand and/or your children are about to start their New Zealand education. The booklet gives an insight into what education looks like in New Zealand and the opportunities available to your child. It also answers some questions you may have and tells you where you can find more information about early childhood, primary and secondary education in New Zealand.

**Whānau = immediate or extended family**



# Learning in New Zealand

The New Zealand education system gives parents and whānau choices about the type of education they want for their child. **Early childhood services** and **schools** in New Zealand offer unique learning experiences that reflect the needs of the child and the wider community.

The education of your child starts early. In New Zealand, children can start **early childhood education** as a baby, toddler or young child. There are many different types of early childhood education available. *Te Whāriki* is the national curriculum for early childhood care and education in New Zealand. It sets out learning outcomes for children in early childhood education.

Most New Zealand children start school at the age of five even though school is not compulsory until children are six. **Primary school** is for children from the ages of five to 13. In primary schools classes are organised in Year levels from Year 1 to Year 8. Some classes may include more than one year level. **Secondary school** classes start at Year 9 and go to Year 13.

Intermediate schools are primary schools for Years 7 and 8 only. Middle schools are for children from Years 7 to 10 only. They are sometimes called junior high schools or junior colleges.

*The words **early childhood services** and **schools** are used in this booklet to include all types of services and schools, including **kōhanga reo** and **kura** (Māori immersion services and schools).*

**New Zealand has two national curriculum documents:**

- *The New Zealand Curriculum*
- *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*
  - a Māori Medium Curriculum

**Primary school** focuses on developing children's reading, writing and mathematics skills through activities from across the eight learning areas of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. National Standards for reading, writing and mathematics give teachers, children, parents and whānau a clear idea of where children are at in their learning, and what they need to do next. Ngā Whanaketanga Rumaki Māori (national standard for *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*) also identifies learning progress in kōrero or speaking.

**Secondary school** is about preparing your child for the future. A broad range of subjects prepare students for further education, training and employment. New Zealand's secondary schools offer national qualifications that are recognised in New Zealand and internationally. The main secondary school qualifications in New Zealand are the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

Regardless of the education choices you make, the New Zealand education system aims to make it easy for your child to move from early childhood education to primary school, and on to secondary school and beyond.

# early childhood education

## IN NEW ZEALAND

Early childhood education services in New Zealand are either teacher-led or parent-led.

### Teacher-led education

In teacher-led services at least half of the adults who educate and care for children must be qualified and registered as early childhood teachers.

- **Kindergartens** enrol children aged between two and school age. They may have separate morning and afternoon sessions for different age groups. Some offer all-day or flexible-hours services. Kindergartens are non profit and community-based.
- **Education and care services** run all-day sessions, or flexible-hours programmes for children from birth to school age. They may be privately owned or operated by a community group. In some communities Pacific early childhood services provide education in a Pacific Island's language and culture.
- **Home-based services** are located in the educator's home, or the child's home. Educators can have up to four children in their care. Qualified and registered teachers (coordinators) visit homes and provide support for educators. In these services, educators may not be qualified or registered teachers.
- **Māori-medium services** offer teacher-led early learning in a Māori learning environment (language and culture).

### Parent and whānau-led education

Parents of the children at these services are the educators. Sometimes there may also be a paid teacher or supervisor to support the parents.

These services enrol children from birth to school age and focus on parent education as well as children's learning.

- **Kōhanga reo** (language nests) are managed by whānau and provide a Māori early learning environment (language and culture) for children from birth to school age.
- **Playcentres** are parent cooperatives, supervised and managed by parents.
- **Playgroups** provide for parents and children to meet for play, and social and learning opportunities.

*Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga* are a type of playgroup that builds learning in te reo Māori and tikanga.

*Pacific playgroups* focus on developing and maintaining Pacific languages and cultures

## QUESTIONS ABOUT

# early childhood

### **How will early childhood education help my child?**

- Early childhood education gives your child the opportunity to learn new skills and build on what they learn at home from you and other family members. It can make all the difference to your child when starting school. High quality early childhood education provides a strong foundation for your child's ongoing learning and development.

### **How do I choose an early childhood service for my child?**

- There can be many things to consider when choosing an early childhood service for your child including location, cost, the quality of education provided, and how much you want to be involved. Before you decide, it is a good idea to visit different services and talk to the manager, head teacher or supervisor. You may want to ask such questions as:
  - Will there be a place for my child or is there a waiting list?
  - How do you make sure children are safe and settled?
  - How will I know what my child has learned?
  - How does the service provide for infants, toddlers and for older children?
  - How is my child's culture reflected in and valued by your service?
  - What is special about this service?
  - My child has special needs. What additional support is available at your service?
- You may also want to spend some time watching how teachers and adults interact with children.

- ERO regularly reviews and publishes reports on the quality of education in licensed early childhood services. The reports are on ERO's website – [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz) – and may help you choose the right service for your child. ERO's booklet, *Early Childhood Education: A Guide for Parents*, may also be useful.

### **Is early childhood education free?**

- Early childhood services may charge fees, which could include the costs of meals. Fees vary and will depend on the type of service and how many hours your child goes each week. The New Zealand government funds up to 20 hours a week early childhood education for children aged three and four. You may also be entitled to extra financial help. The service will be able to advise you on what, if any, financial help is available and how much you will be expected to pay yourself.



# primary & secondary schools

New Zealand state schools (government owned and funded) provide free education to New Zealand citizens or permanent residents. A small number of schools are state integrated or private schools. State integrated schools are privately owned but receive some funding from the government

Both state and integrated schools are governed by parent-elected boards of trustees. The principal and teaching staff are responsible for the day-to-day running of the school.

- **State schools** provide free education and the curriculum is secular (non religious). These schools provide a broad and flexible curriculum based on the national curriculum documents, *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*. Each school designs their curriculum to meet the needs of the local community.
- **Integrated schools** are part of the state system but have a special character (usually religious). They may be linked to a particular church. Apart from this special character they follow *The New Zealand Curriculum*.
- **Independent or Private schools** make up a small percentage of New Zealand schools. These schools do not have to use the national curriculum. Most of these schools, at secondary level, prepare students for qualifications on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.
- **Te Kura/The Correspondence School** is a state school that provides distance education from early childhood to Year 13 for students who are unable to attend an early childhood service or school.
- **Special schools** are state schools that provide support for students with severe disabilities and high needs. They include regional health schools to teach children in hospital or at home if they are too sick to attend school.
- **Partnership schools/Kura Hourua** provide flexible education opportunities through a partnership of education, business sector and community groups.
- **Homeschooling** is an option for parents provided they meet criteria set by the Ministry of Education.

**For more information about types of schools:**  
[www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)



# kaupapa Māori

## MĀORI MEDIUM EDUCATION

A unique feature of New Zealand's education system is Māori medium education which is available at early childhood, primary and secondary levels.

Māori medium education is based on a Māori world view and Māori ways of teaching.

**Kōhanga reo** (language nests) provide a kaupapa Māori environment (language and culture) for children from birth to school age. Kōhanga reo use the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki* as the basis for learning programmes. Whānau (family) manage and operate the kōhanga reo with support and guidance from Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust.

**Ngā Puna Kōhungahunga** are a type of playgroup that builds learning in te reo Māori (language) and tikanga (custom). Parents and whānau are involved in running the sessions and receive information, support and training from the Ministry of Education. Learning may be in both English and te reo or in te reo only.

**Kura Kaupapa Māori** (Māori medium schools) use te reo Māori in all of their teaching and provide opportunities for students to learn the English language at a particular stage of their schooling. Students of kura develop strong connections to their culture, language and identity. They are expected to be successful, as Māori, in te ao Māori and in the wider world.

**Kura ā-Iwi** have a similar approach as kura kaupapa Māori and are strongly connected to their local iwi (tribe). The curriculum reflects the language and the traditional customs and practices of the local iwi.

Some kura are for primary school students only, while other kura (wharekura) include secondary students as well. Secondary students follow a learning programme where students can achieve National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) qualifications and tertiary qualifications.

Each kura can decide when and how much English language will be taught.

Some English medium schools have **Rumaki** (immersion) or bilingual classes where the learning programmes may reflect the principles of *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (National Curriculum for Māori medium).

### TE MARAUTANGA O AOTEAROA

Ngā Wāhanga Ako – the learning areas

**Te Reo Māori**  
*Māori language*

**Ngā Toi**  
*The Arts*

**Pāngarau**  
*Mathematics*

**Tikanga ā-Iwi**  
*Social Sciences*

**Hauora**  
*Health and physical wellbeing*

**Te Reo Pākehā**  
*English language*

**Pūtaiao**  
*Science*

**Hangarau**  
*Technology*

**Ngā Reo**  
*Languages*



# questions about school

## *When should my child start school?*

- Schooling is compulsory for New Zealand citizens and residents between the ages of six and 16, but most students start school at the age of five and can continue until they are 19.

## *How do I choose a school for my child?*

- The first step is to find out which school(s) your child can go to. In some areas schools limit enrolment to students living in a specified area. This is called the 'school zone'. You can get local information from the Ministry of Education and by talking to your local schools' principals.
- ERO regularly reviews and publishes reports on the quality of education all schools provide. You can read these reports on ERO's website – [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz). You may also find the ERO booklet, *Choosing a School for a Five Year Old*, useful when making your decision.

## *Do schools have to enrol my child?*

- New Zealand state and integrated schools should enrol all students in their local area or within the school zone.

## *Do I have to pay for my child to go to school?*

- Education in New Zealand state schools is free. However, many schools ask parents to make a donation for a wider range of learning activities and suggest a set amount. This payment is voluntary. Schools can also charge for materials students use in some subjects such as technology. It is also usual to charge for the cost of travel on school trips.

## *How do I enrol my child in a school?*

- You should first contact the school and get any forms you need to complete. You can make an appointment with the Principal or other staff member to talk about your child and their transition into the school. Many primary schools have a transition programme to help children move from early childhood education to their local primary school.
- You will need to provide documentation, including your child's birth certificate and immunisation records. If your child is not a New Zealand citizen, you will need to show proof of your child's New Zealand residence status.

## *Do children who have very particular needs because of a disability, certain behaviour, or because they don't speak much English get the help they need at school?*

- New Zealand state and integrated schools should enrol all students in their local area, regardless of their level of educational need. Schools receive funding to give the specialised assistance that some children need. This money is used for a variety of purposes such as improving physical facilities, providing one-on-one adult support or specialised teaching. You will need to talk to the school about any additional support your child needs.

## *Do schools have boarding facilities for students?*

- Boarding facilities are available at some private primary schools and some secondary schools. They are generally called hostels and charge boarding fees. Some families may be eligible for a Boarding Allowance. More information about this and how to apply is on the Ministry of Education's website – [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz).



## QUESTIONS ABOUT

# primary school

## THE FIRST EIGHT YEARS AT SCHOOL

### *Will my child go to the same school for all of their primary education?*

- That depends on the school. Yes, if they go to a primary school that goes up to Year 8 or a school that has both primary and secondary students. No, if they go to a primary school for Years 1 to 6 only.

### *Do all primary schools have boys and girls?*

- All state primary and intermediate schools include boys and girls. Some integrated and private primary schools offer a single-sex option.

### *How are students grouped into classes?*

- At primary school level students generally have all or most of their learning in one classroom, with one teacher. By Years 7 and 8 they may have a wider range of teachers. Classes are not necessarily made up of students from one year level. They may group together two, three or even more year levels, particularly in smaller schools. Teachers in New Zealand are trained to teach students according to their learning needs, strengths and interests rather than their age.

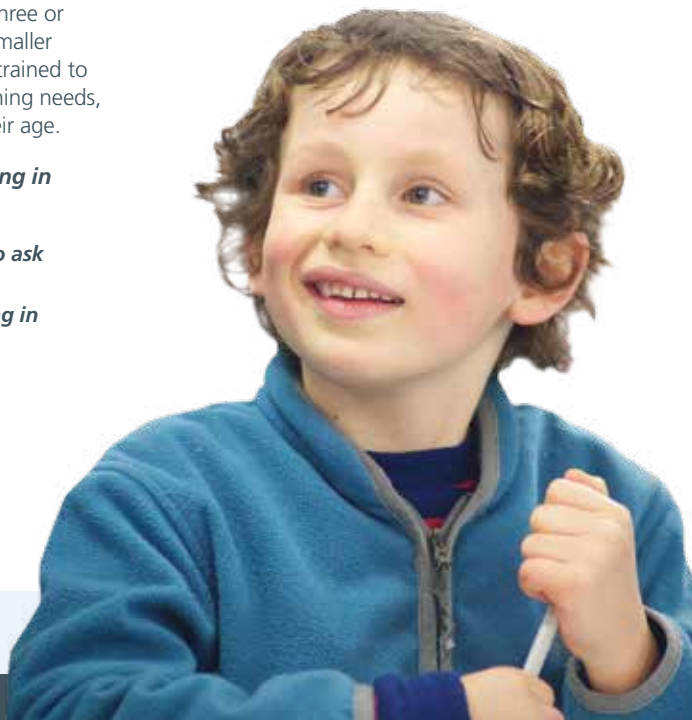
### *Read more about teaching and learning in New Zealand in ERO's booklets*

- ☰ *How is my child doing? Questions to ask at school*
- ☰ *Effective Teaching: What's happening in my child's classroom.*

## THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM

### learning areas

- > *English*
- > *The arts*
- > *Health and physical education*
- > *Learning languages*
- > *Mathematics and statistics*
- > *Science*
- > *Social sciences*
- > *Technology*



## QUESTIONS ABOUT

# secondary school

## YEARS 9-13

In New Zealand, most secondary schools include Years 9 to 13. Some children may spend longer at secondary school and that is why secondary education sometimes refers to Years 9 to 15. There are single sex and coeducational (mixed) secondary schools in New Zealand.

### *How are students grouped into classes?*

- Students are usually taught by a range of specialist subject teachers. They often have form classes or tutor groups and have one teacher who monitors their overall progress and pastoral needs. These form teachers are usually supported by deans at each year level.

### *Who should I contact to discuss matters concerning my teenager?*

- The form teacher or year-level dean would usually be the first person to contact about your teenager's progress, any concerns you may have or what subjects they should be studying to achieve their career goals. Your teenager should be able to get specialist counselling and career guidance services in their school.

## YEARS 9 & 10

### *What will be the focus of my teenager's programme at this level?*

- Years 9 and 10 lay the foundations for success in The National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in Years 11 to 13. Students are taught a broad range of subjects that help them discover their strengths and interests, and think about what they might want to do in the future. Strengthening reading, writing and mathematics is still important during these years.

## YEARS 11 TO 13

### *What will be the focus of my teenager's programme at this level?*

- Courses at senior level begin to focus more on future career pathways. Students need to choose subjects that reflect their strengths and interests, as well as keeping their options open for the future. The school's careers advisor, guidance counsellor and dean will be able to help you and your teenager with these decisions. You can also use the vocational pathways tool to help your child make informed choices about how to meet their future training or employment goals – [www.youthguarantee.net.nz/vocational-pathways](http://www.youthguarantee.net.nz/vocational-pathways).

### *What qualifications are available at secondary school?*

- The National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are national qualifications for senior secondary students (Years 11-13). Some schools offer other qualifications such as the Cambridge International Examinations and the International Baccalaureate (IB).
- Most Year 11 to 13 students choose their own subjects and work towards gaining NCEA credits. They get credits across a range of subjects to meet the requirements for each NCEA level.

### *Will my teenager be expected to complete NCEA in three years?*

Many students achieve Level 1 at Year 11, Level 2 at Year 12 and Level 3 at Year 13. However, not all students learn at the same pace. Most schools offer students the opportunity to complete NCEA over a longer period. Students can study for credits at different NCEA levels during a year.

### **What level of NCEA will my teenager need?**

Level 2 NCEA is regarded as the minimum target that all students should work towards. Entry requirements to post-secondary courses vary. Your teenager should think carefully about their subject choice to make sure they achieve the qualifications they need.

### **What qualification does my teenager need to go to a New Zealand university**

NCEA Level 3 is the minimum requirement.

## ALTERNATIVE SECONDARY SCHOOL OPTIONS

The New Zealand education system has options for some students who have difficulty staying in mainstream schools. These options are usually managed by the school. They give students the opportunity to work towards achieving national qualifications.

**Activity Centres** provide alternative schooling for some Years 9 and 10 students. These students have been referred by their enrolling schools because they are likely to benefit from a specialist programme that will meet their social and academic needs.

**Secondary Tertiary Partnerships or Trades Academies** provide 15 to 17 year olds with the opportunity to combine a secondary school programme with trades and technology programmes taught in a tertiary and/or industry setting. Students remain enrolled at the secondary school while attending a tertiary institute for some or most of the school day.

**Service academies** provide military-focused education for secondary students who have had average to limited success at school. Education at a service academy involves academic study, outdoor education and physical fitness, goal setting, leadership and life skills.

**Alternative Education** is for students aged 13 to 16 who have been alienated from mainstream schools.

**Teen Parent Units** provide education for teenage students who are pregnant, or are parents, in an environment that supports them in their roles as both learners and parents.

**Tertiary = the level of education that follows secondary school**

### **For more information:**

NCEA - [www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)

Secondary school options - [www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)

ERO's booklet – **From education to employment: Questions to ask at school**



# Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa The Child – the Heart of the Matter

## Government Education Agencies

### → EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE

*ERO reviews the quality of education in schools and early childhood services and publishes reports on individual services and schools. ERO also publishes national reports on current education topics and booklets for parents. All reports and publications are on ERO's website:*

**[www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz)**

Email: [info@ero.govt.nz](mailto:info@ero.govt.nz)

Phone: 04-499 2489

### → MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

*The Ministry of Education is responsible for the New Zealand education system. For information and resources for parents, visit these websites:*

**[www.minedu.govt.nz](http://www.minedu.govt.nz)**

**[www.educationcounts.govt.nz](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz)**

### → NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

*The New Zealand Qualifications Authority administers NCEA. It is also responsible for the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF), which contains a comprehensive list of recognised qualifications in New Zealand.*

**[www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)**

### → OTHER RESOURCES

- ☰ How is my child doing?  
Questions to ask at school
- ☰ Effective Teaching:  
What's happening in my child's classroom
- ☰ School Trustees:  
Helping you ask the right questions
- ☰ From education to employment:  
Questions to ask at school

*Other ERO publications you may find useful:*

- ☰ Early Childhood Education:  
A Guide for Parents
- ☰ Choosing a School for a Five Year Old