Effective Practice in Education
Professional development case studies in Auckland and Northland schools

A West Auckland school makes new connections with whānau
In partnership with Team Solutions, a special school connects with the Ka Hikitia strategy for Māori student success and develops new relationships with whānau to create positive learning experiences for students.

Ka Hikitia: from policy to practice

“Ka Hikitia asks leaders to work in different ways, based on participation and partnership, and a recognition that it is valuable to share power and decision-making with whānau. This is where the thinking around Ka Hikitia becomes real.”

Paul Manson, Team Solutions facilitator

Arohanui Special School

Arohanui Special School is located in West Auckland and caters for students with specific learning needs. Classes are spread across 14 school sites in Waitakere City including a special character class sited at a local Catholic school. The school has nearly 140 students and around 90 staff, including a number of teacher aides, specialist staff and therapists. Around 20% of the student population is Māori. The school’s vision is based on the values of aroha, reflectiveness, cultural inclusiveness, community, respect for diversity and professionalism. The key competencies from The New Zealand Curriculum form the basis for the students’ Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals.

The challenge

Facilitator Paul Manson worked with Arohanui Special School’s deputy principal Gill Hedley and principal James Le Marquand to set a goal for promoting student and whānau engagement in new ways. “As a special school, there was a particular challenge,” notes Paul. “Most of the students come to school by taxi. So most of the whānau didn’t know each other well. I guess there was no common whānau link.”

The school had previously arranged hui for Māori parents but these had always been organised and directed by staff. Following Paul’s initial work around Ka Hikitia, the school leadership team decided to try and work alongside whānau more. “Ka Hikitia asks leaders to work in different ways, based on participation and partnership, and a recognition that it is valuable to share power and decision-making with whānau. This is where the thinking around Ka Hikitia becomes real,” says Paul.

As a Team Solutions facilitator, Paul sees his key role as helping school leaders and teachers understand the relevance of Ka Hikitia in setting a strategic direction for their school. “But Ka Hikitia can be challenging because it is at a strategic level. It doesn’t have a back section of achievement objectives like The New Zealand Curriculum.”

“As a school, we had ideas about how we could do more to meet the needs of our Māori students,” says Gill Hedley. “We had the documentation but wanted to make things real. Paul was able to share...
with us practical examples of challenges and successes from other schools and from his own experience as a principal. He gave us the courage and inspiration to take action.”

Paul worked with the leadership team to explore questions such as, ‘Instead of focusing on deficit, what does realising potential look like for our students?’ Paul used a summary table from *Ka Hikitia* to facilitate this thinking, adding an extra column to the one in the document, to assist the leadership team in its reflections (see figure 1).

Paul says that, “*Ka Hikitia* provides clear points of leverage to effectively work in schools at an in-depth level – not just at the level of strategic thinking but at an in-depth practical level.”

Over a period of time, a Māori Student Achievement Plan was developed at Arohanui Special School with Paul acting as a mentor during this process. The school aimed to raise the profile of tikanga Māori and connect more effectively with Māori whānau. Half the teachers are overseas trained and it was important to work in a way that made the journey achievable for everyone.

### Reconnecting with whānau

Reflecting on the *Ka Hikitia* document, plans were made in term 2 for the school to connect with whānau. A hui was organised and personal invitations were offered - either at the school gate or through phone calls and visits. The hui agenda was open ended with the main aim to provide a forum for the school to listen, rather than to talk.

This hui involved an initial greeting and kai. School leadership then ‘handed over’ the running of the hui to whānau members. Two of the questions the school asked at the hui were, ‘when we work together, what can we do better together for students?’ and ‘how can you contribute to the school?’

### Whānau group

One of the outcomes from the term 2 hui was the establishment of a ‘whānau group’, initially made up of four parents, then growing to ten. The group met fortnightly with Gill and her team at the school, during school time, and were joined by a number of other staff members.

The whānau group’s agenda involved broad issues around school-whānau connections. “The parents talked a lot about their kids,” says Gill. “For parents with special needs children, they don’t often have the opportunity to have these conversations regularly and make these connections. One mother had never previously come into the school to talk about her son’s achievement. Since being involved in the whānau group she has now come forward and asked staff to address a long standing concern she had about her son. The matter has now been addressed and her son is making much better progress.”

“For me personally, this was an amazing process,” shares Gill. “I had to work in a different way. I had to be more of a listener and less directive. It was a lovely atmosphere with lots of humour and we worked very collaboratively.”

From the whānau group discussions came a number of ideas. These included involving whānau in the school’s term 3 Māori arts theme, arranging a visit to a local marae and putting down a hangi at the school in term 4.

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**Ka Hikitia: Māori potential approach in education**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less focus on</th>
<th>More focus on</th>
<th>What does/could this look like in our school?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remedying deficit</td>
<td>Realising potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems of dysfunction</td>
<td>Identifying opportunity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government intervention</td>
<td>Investing in people with local solutions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting deficit</td>
<td>Tailoring education to the learner</td>
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<tr>
<td>Māori as a minority</td>
<td>Indigenerity and distinctiveness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructing and informing</td>
<td>Collaborating and co-constructing</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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*Figure 1: Adapted from Ministry of Education (2008). *Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success.* (p19)*.
Māori arts theme

Arohanui School has a strong focus on the arts. As a special school, art is one of the primary contexts to develop students’ skills. “The Māori arts theme has been a great success,” says Gill, noting that many of the teachers continued the theme for a second term. Among the focus areas were a traditional bread-making workshop given by one of the mothers, and lessons for teachers and students to learn te reo Māori and waiata. These are just two examples of curriculum based activities where Māori whānau have become the teachers and contributed school-wide to the success of learning in all classrooms. “The students loved it,” says Gill, adding that it was an opportunity for teachers to recognise the prior cultural knowledge of a number of their students.

Assistant principal Trudi Brocas says one of the best things about the Māori arts theme was the direct involvement of whānau in a number of classrooms. “It was staff and whānau working together and bringing their skills to the fore. It has been a very positive experience for our school.”

“For me personally, this was an amazing process. I had to work in a different way. I had to be more of a listener and less directive. It was a lovely atmosphere with lots of humour and we worked collaboratively.”

Gill Hedley, Deputy Principal, Arohanui Special School

Bringing the school together

For Arohanui Special School, putting policy into practice has involved bringing the whole school together for the first time ever. The year’s work culminated in two projects coming alive in term 4. The first of these was a hangi hosted at the school’s base in Waitakere and the second was a local marae visit. Doing both posed a number of challenges.

The school has 14 satellite sites and there are logistical difficulties providing transport and ensuring the safety and well-being of students and staff. When the whānau group suggested that the whole school could be brought together for a hangi, the leadership team at the school embraced the idea. “We had never brought the whole school together before, including all our satellites,” says Gill. “To move our whole school is massive.” The hangi was dug in the school’s sports field in Te Atatu with many of the whānau group playing key roles preparing the site and the kai.

“One of the parents said to me – if you put on food, they will come – and that was exactly what happened,” says Gill. “It took a lot of organising. The safety of our students is always a major exercise, but it was worth it. The hangi was an amazing success.”

The school also arranged for all students and staff to visit Hoani Waititi marae, an urban marae in Waitakere City. Students took part in the pōwhiri and had the opportunity to be involved in the proceedings.

“It was staff and whānau working together and bringing their skills to the fore. It has been a very positive experience for our school.”

Trudi Brocas, Assistant Principal, Arohanui Special School

The marae visit served to bring a number of families together and developed a closer connection between the school and its parent community. Gill and principal James Le Marquand hope that more of these kinds of community connections can occur again in the future.

Looking to the future

The whānau group has now developed to the extent that it does not depend on any one member. It is self-sustaining. “Our principal James has been fully supportive the whole way through,” says Gill.

Staff have enjoyed and noticed the benefits that come from being more culturally responsive to their Māori students. “More of our Māori parents are confident talking with us about their children. We don’t want to lose the gains we have made,” says Gill.

For Gill, and for the teachers at Arohanui Special School, this has been a significant journey. “It has definitely been our journey but Paul has mentored us and it wouldn’t have happened without him,” says Gill. “On two levels it’s been a good journey. On a personal level I have learnt a lot and for the school it’s been very effective in engaging people with Māori perspectives and working with our Māori community. Teachers have been blown away by the contributions from our whānau.”

Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success

‘Ka Hikitia’ means to ‘step up’, to ‘lift up’ or to ‘lengthen one’s stride’. In the context of Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012, it means stepping up the performance of the education system to ensure Māori are enjoying educational success as Māori.

An inquiry focus

The diagram below was developed as a reflection, discussion and planning tool by Paul Manson, leadership and management facilitator at Team Solutions, in his work with Arohanui Special School.

Acknowledgements

Effective Practice in Education: Professional development case studies in Auckland and Northland schools is a series of case studies that has been developed to demonstrate effective ways that schools work in partnership with Team Solutions. Each case study looks at innovative professional learning partnerships that bring about sustainable change in teaching practice to improve student achievement and engagement.

This case study demonstrates the advantages and gains that can be made when schools actively involve and engage parents with their students’ learning.

Team Solutions would like to thank Arohanui Special School principal James Le Marquand and deputy principal Gill Hedley for their cooperation and warm welcome into the school when we visited to prepare material for this case study.

Thanks also to the teachers and students for welcoming us into their classrooms to take photos and Hoane Waititi Marae Inc. for allowing us to use photos taken on the day of the school’s marae visit.

Te kāhui akoranga ngaio

Camilla Highfield, Director

Contributing writers for this case study were Karl Mutch and Kate Backler.

School photographs by Kate Backler. Marae photographs supplied by Arohanui Special School. Front cover photo: Student Sam Walker and Shane White hangi at Hoani Waititi marae.

Team Solutions contacts for Auckland and Northland schools

Team Solutions provides quality professional development to support teachers and leaders in Auckland and Northland schools. It is an integral part of the Faculty of Education at The University of Auckland. In most instances the service provided by Team Solutions is funded through the Ministry of Education.

To discuss how your school may benefit from working in partnership with a Team Solutions leadership and management facilitator, contact:

Gayle Britten, Team Leader

Contact for support with:
- Ka Hikitia strategy
- Leading learning
- Pasifika Education Plan
- Home School Partnerships
- Kiwi Leadership for Principals

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