



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI

Children's  
Commissioner

**"Oh, bro I would change everything."** *(Student in private training establishment, Māori)*

## **Education matters to me:**

'If I were the boss' - Improving our education

**Detailed report 4 of 6**

**'Education matters to me' series**

A starting point for the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities

March 2018

Please respect the voices of the children and young people that have contributed to this report.  
To reference this report, please include the full title: **Education matters to me: 'If I were the boss' - Improving our education**, and a link to the online version at [www.occ.org.nz](http://www.occ.org.nz) or [www.nzsta.org.nz](http://www.nzsta.org.nz)

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# Education matters to me: 'If I were the boss' – Improving our education

## ***Detailed Report 4 of 6 At A Glance***

*This detailed report belongs to a series that supports the **Education matters to me: Key Insights report. A starting point for the Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities**<sup>1</sup>, released January 2018. A pictorial summary of the key insights is included as an appendix.*

The Children's Commissioner and the School Trustees Association have a shared interest in ensuring the National Education and Learning Priorities are grounded in the needs and lived experiences of all tamariki and rangatahi in Aotearoa. We engaged with children and young people face to face and through online surveys to hear their views on education. This engagement was initiated to help ensure that voices of rangatahi and tamariki contribute to the development of National Education and Learning Priorities that are to be introduced for the first time in 2018.

We wanted to hear from children and young people about their experiences; especially what was working well and how things could be better for them. We started from a position informed by the views of tamariki and rangatahi from previous engagements and some of the well-documented challenges in the education system. With this foundation we were able to focus our engagements with children and young people on six key areas of enquiry, which correlate directly to the following six detailed reports.

- 1. Achievement**
- 2. Emotional wellbeing**
- 3. Transitions**
- 4. Engagement**
- 5. Experiences of tamariki and rangatahi Māori**
- 6. *'If I were the boss' – Improving our education***

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.occ.org.nz/publications/reports/education-matters-to-me-key-insights/>

This is one of six supporting reports that give more detail on each of these main areas of enquiry. As real life does not fit into neat compartments, the feedback we received from children and young people quite often overlaps areas of enquiry. This means some reports share common themes, and some statements we heard have been used in more than one report to help tell the story. The reports can stand alone, or be read alongside the others.

The six key insights from the whole engagement are explored further in the *Key Insights* report. You can access the insights report and all the other supporting reports on the NZSTA and Office of the Children's Commissioner websites.

Children and young people across a diverse range of engagement groups spoke about three key factors, which they require to have a successful experience in education. These were: a great teacher; a supportive and involved family, and friends.

*'If I were the boss'*-improving our education is the area of enquiry explored in this report.

## **If you were the boss what changes would you make?**

We asked children and young people they would change (if anything) at their school/course/kura to make it better for them.

To do this, we asked questions along the themes of:

**If you were the boss what changes would you make?**

**If you could change anything what would you change?**

**What would make school better for you?**

### **Glossary**

<b>āhuru mōwai</b>	safe space
<b>ingo</b>	desire
<b>kaiako</b>	teacher
<b>kaikiri</b>	racist
<b>māuiui</b>	sick
<b>orotau</b>	understand
<b>rangatahi</b>	youth
<b>tamariki</b>	children
<b>whakamā</b>	embarrassed
<b>whakawhānaungatanga</b>	building relationships

We heard over 1600 responses from rangatahi and tamariki. Not all issues could be covered in depth. The top findings are a summary of consistent messages we heard from children and young people on a number of issues.

A greater diversity of engagement, e.g. with rural and provincial schools, may generate even greater diversity of ideas about children's experiences and what they think would make schooling great for them.

### **The responses we gathered from children and young people have been grouped into six findings:**

**Finding 1** Change how classes are run

**Finding 2** A better physical environment

**Finding 3** Make learning relevant and fun

**Finding 4** Prepare me for my future

**Finding 5** Stop bullying

**Finding 6** School is great

Throughout this report we share many quotes from children and young people. When we do, we will indicate the type of learning centre that the child or young person is attending, and their ethnicity.

For many reasons, categorising ethnicity can be subjective. In this report, some children and young people chose not to share their ethnicity. Ethnicities cited from face to face engagement are self-identified and based on the terminology used by the children and young people. Online survey response use categories used by StatsNZ Tatauranga Aotearoa.

Throughout this report we have used the terms 'tamariki / children' and 'rangatahi / young people' interchangeably to refer to all children that we spoke with.

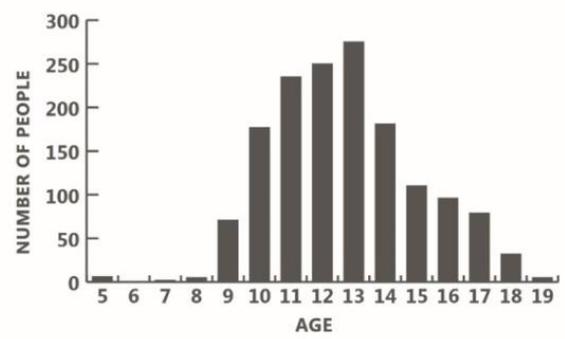
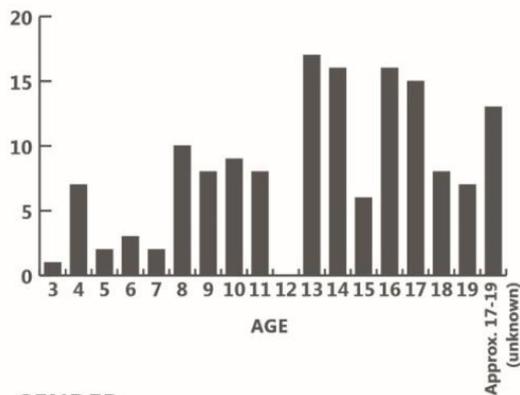
## Who did we talk with?

During October and November 2017, we engaged with 1,678 children and young people face to face and through online surveys to hear their views on education. We heard from rangatahi and tamariki in primary, intermediate and secondary schools, alternative education centres, kōhanga reo, kura kaupapa Māori, learning support units and teen parent units, as well as home schooled students.

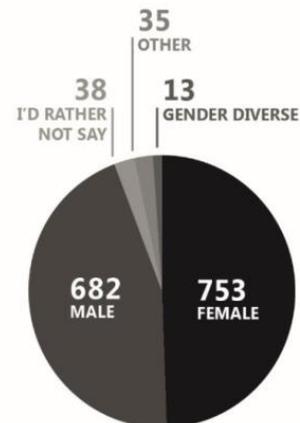
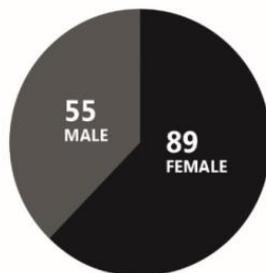
**144** Face to face engagements  
*Kanohi ki te kanohi*

**1534** Online responses  
*Urupare ā-ipurangi*

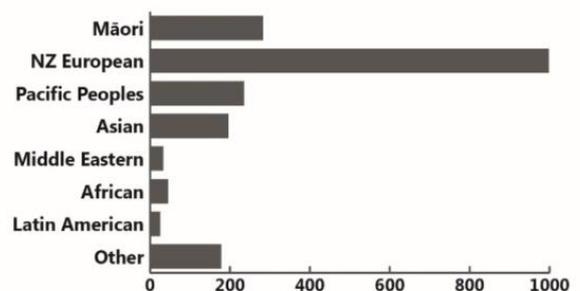
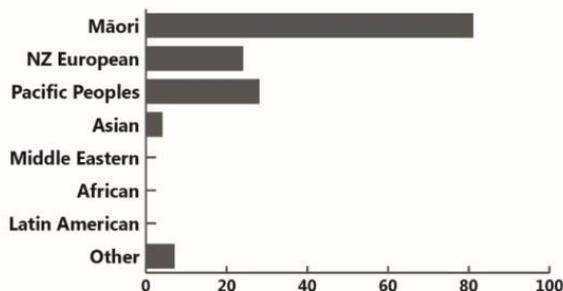
### AGE



### GENDER



### ETHNICITY



## Change how classes are run<sup>2</sup>

Children and young people told us that the way classes are organised and managed is important to them being able to feel safe, heard, and able to concentrate on learning. This includes things like: starting school later, earlier or having a choice; timetables; behaviour management in class; and streaming.

**“I would move form-time to the start of the day. This way, late comers don't miss out on important class time.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Make sure everyone is having fun & enjoying their work but still focusing. I would also make sure that all the kids were getting along and no one was getting bullied.”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**“I would want to be able to work outside and learn more languages.”** *(Intermediate school student, Māori/NZ European)*

We heard that disrespectful or disruptive behaviour from others in the class makes it difficult to concentrate, and makes children and young people unsettled.

[I would change ] **“behaviour of the same naughty boys who need to listen to all the teachers.”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**“I would change this school to have more respectful manners and too those who are disrespectful they will have to do pay by doing more consequences.”** *(Intermediate school student, Pacific Peoples)*

Some children and young people also told us that teachers need to respect students, listen, understand them and be polite.

**“...rule breaking would not be punished straight away and instead warnings would be issued, because most of the time, people don't know they're breaking the rules, or they have a reason.”** *(Secondary school student, Middle Eastern)*

**“The way the teachers treat the students, and they reply to them more politely.”** *(Intermediate school student, NZ European)*

Some children and young people told us that organising classes into large groups in large spaces makes it harder for them to follow what's going on, and focus on learning<sup>3</sup>. Several comments related to 'flexible learning spaces' or 'studios' where

<sup>2</sup> This finding is also discussed further in the following reports: *Education matters to me: Progress and achievement*, *Education matters to me: Emotional wellbeing* and *Education matters to me: Engagement*

multiple classrooms are designed to be opened out into one large, open-plan space for team teaching.

[I would change] **“the big studios because it gets too confusing at times and is really loud pretty much all the time.”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**“Smaller classes and more options available for subjects and cultural activities.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“I would change the classrooms back to single classrooms with desks and stuff and have extension classes”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**“The studios are too big and we only have 4 teachers and 1 assistant teacher so people can get away with bad things they do sometimes.”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

Some children and young people said they would make the school day more responsive to their natural attention span and body clocks.

**“Another thing I'd change is that as not everyone is a morning person and all school time frames happen to be crafted for morning people, I would have two options for timetables, for morning people and night owls...”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Make school shorter”** *(Primary school student, Māori/NZ European)*

**“Having 6 periods a day. It's tiring and hard to keep track of what you're learning in which class. That's what I would change.”** *(Secondary school student, Pacific Peoples)*

We heard that some tamariki and young people feel that they are not challenged enough when the range of abilities in their class is too broad, while others felt that they suffer when it is not broad enough:

**“I kind of wish that the classes were still streamed. I would like it if kids that put a lot of effort in and enjoy a subject were put in groups and pushed to their full potential, instead of it just getting wasted and worse.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Have separate classes for people who like to learn and people who don't care. Also I think they should have different teaching methods for students who learn in different ways (such as myself).”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Help the kids who are really struggling. Maybe stream classes aren't the best thing since the children who don't make it in get pushed back and put into classes that don't help them.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

One young person told us that classes need to be managed in a way that retains the interest and excitement of the subject, and be less constrained by school rules:



**“Senior chemistry needs more explosions and no one cares about those risk assessments bc no one's gonna actually throw a gauze mat across the room.”** *(Secondary school student, Māori/NZ European)*

## A better physical environment<sup>4</sup>

Children and young people at every type of school want their school grounds, buildings and facilities to look and feel clean, well-cared for and a nice place to spend time.

**“Make sure all the buildings and resources are spent properly so that classes and facilities have the right stuff and are comfortable.”** (Student from private training establishment, Māori)

**“Rebuild all of it and make it cleaner.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**“People stop littering.”** (Composite school student, Pacific Peoples)

**“Have more rubbish bins.”** (Intermediate school student, Asian)

**“I would change the colours of the walls.”** (Kura kaupapa student, Māori)

They want facilities for play and sports, and for it to be in good working order.

**“I would change the playground.”** (Primary school student, Māori)

**“Get actual goals with nets for sports, get a larger performing building.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

If you could change one thing about your school/course/kura, what would it be?

I oku whakaaro me hanga matau he gym.

**“I oku [whakaaro] me hanga matau he gym.” | “My thoughts are, we should build a gym”** (Kura kaupapa student, Māori)

Children and young people frequently commented on the state of their schools, equipment, outdoor facilities, hygiene (or the lack of it) and environmental conditions of the classroom.

[I would change] **“The toilets and water fountains being cleaner.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

[I would change] **“Facilities (toilets/classrooms etc).”** (Secondary school student, Asian)

**“...The bathrooms are also gross as they hardly ever have toilet paper or soap, the hand dryers don't work, only a few have sanitary bins, and half of**

<sup>4</sup> This finding is discussed further in the following reports: *Education matters to me: Progress and achievement*, *Education matters to me: Emotional wellbeing* and *Education matters to me: Transitions*

**them don't even flush, which is disgusting.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**“Get more rubbish bins because the school is hory as.”** (Student from private training establishment, Māori)

**“Better toilets and hang out areas.”** (Secondary school student, Māori and Pacifica)

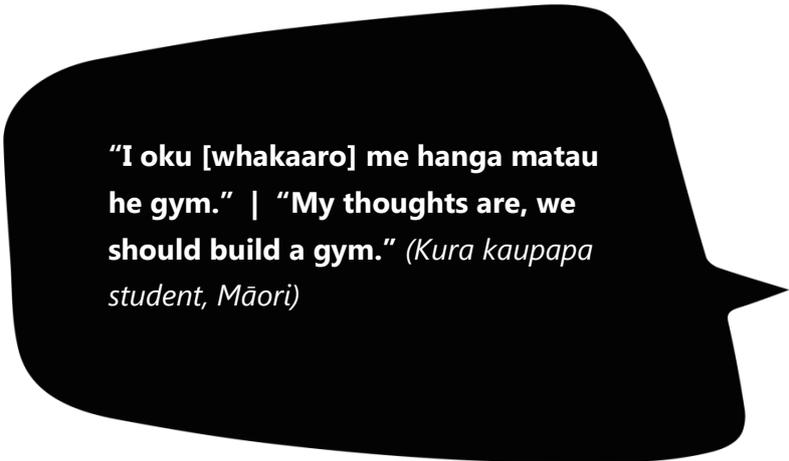
**“Air conditioning. The classrooms get so bloody hot that they're unbearable...”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**“Get the mould out of the level 4 link well [corridor].”** (Secondary school student, NZ European/Māori)

One six-year old girl spoke about the importance of spaces which support social interactions.



**“Every school should have its own café because people can meet there and see each other.”** (Home-schooled student, Pākehā)



**“I oku [whakaaro] me hanga matau he gym.” | “My thoughts are, we should build a gym.”** (Kura kaupapa student, Māori)

## Make learning relevant and fun<sup>5</sup>

**“Invest in my teachers so that they teach with passion, that it’s not just about teaching but more than that, you change lives.”** *(Secondary school student, Samoan)*

We received a lot of comments from children and young people about how they would like their teachers to teach.

### Teach me how I learn best

They told us that they want to learn, they want to get help promptly and constructively when they ask for it to help them learn, and they want to be able to understand and enjoy the process, not feel as if they are being pressured to do things that have no purpose.

**“More engaged teaching, and on topic.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Less of the teacher talking at the students something more interactive.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“I would change the way teachers teach, so they talk and show you what to do.”** *(Primary school student, ethnicity not disclosed)*

**“If you can't do something you should get help straight away.”** *(Primary school student, Latin American)*

**“Give more help to students who struggle and are kind of flying under the radar.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“I would help to ensure students are in the correct class or learning arrangement to gain the most out of their learning.”** *(Secondary school student, Māori)*

**“Better support for all students, not just the ones who are failing...”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“More fun stuff, more things that help us understand what we are learning about.”** *(Student not in education, employment or training, Maori)*

<sup>5</sup> This finding is also discussed further in the following reports: *Education matters to me: Progress and achievement*, *Education matters to me: Emotional wellbeing* and *Education matters to me: Engagement*

## Know my style of learning

Children and young people told us that they want teachers to teach in ways that suit the way they learn. They know what works for them, and want to be active participants in creating their own success:

**“Flexible teaching, some students just don’t learn the same way.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European/German)*

**“I’d implement more available study sessions at senior level for seniors to develop independent learning.”** *(Secondary school student, Māori/NZ European)*

**“Give more time for people to learn from each other and do things that are important to themselves.”** *(Student in supported learning centre, Pākehā)*

**“Instead of one hour classes, should dedicate one subject to one day or at least have 3 hours a day per subject due to the fact that one hour is not enough time for teachers to go over everything as well as practise and the teacher usually does not go around to every student who needs help as they spent at least half an hour on one student.”** *(Secondary school student, Pacific peoples)*

**“Learn by doing.”** *(Student not in education, employment or training, Māori/Pākehā)*

**“... I want to be able to learn in a way that I benefit most, so we have choice to learn in the best way possible.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“... More hands-on tasks and more enjoyable standards.”** *(Student in Kura kaupapa Māori, ethnicity not disclosed)*

Some children and young people suggested specific ways that teachers could be more effective in helping them learn:

**“I would give students enough preparation in the early years so they don't find it too difficult when they go up stages.”** *(Secondary school student, Asian)*

**“If I was the boss of my school I would try - make things easier for a lot of students and try to do my best in keeping students in class and at school! Like for example the kids that didn't enjoy going to class - I'd try to make that class fun and cool so that they enjoy it...”** *(Secondary school student, Samoan/Maori)*

## I learn best outside the classroom

Some students suggested that schools could go on more school trips to learn about subjects like nature or simply have class time outside and more breaks outside as they often feel stuck inside.

**"I love free play time and getting outside so that I can actually breathe."**  
(Primary school student, Kiwi/Canadian).

**"More trips to see things outside the kohanga." [translated]** (Kohanga reo tauira, Māori)

**"Do more things in the community or outside of school."** (Student in supported learning centre, Māori)

**"...I would encourage teachers to teach excitingly with outside the classroom activities happening often (by which I mean going and doing things outside that relate to subject matter)." (Secondary school student, NZ European)**

## If you give us homework, make it useful

We heard that many young people would change the amount of homework that is set at secondary school, especially when it seems arbitrary or irrelevant, or teachers do not care enough about it to follow up.

**"Homework not too much especially maths."** (Secondary school student, Pacific People)

**"How much homework, and how many essays and exams we have to do."**  
(Secondary school student, NZ European)

**"...homework that takes more than ten minutes would be banned, as people have hobbies and have already had school. Plus we have homework every day, for almost all of our classes. would should not be sacrificing our sleep for homework that nobody even cares about in the end. I was told by my maths teacher that 'if your homework takes more than two hours, it's okay, you don't have to do it'. even without homework, I don't have two hours of free time..." (Secondary school student, NZ European)**

**"...less homework because no one actually has time for that, and if I can't sleep at school then I'm not doing work at home between out of school activities, okay?" (Secondary school student, NZ European/Pacific People)**

## Computers and technology are cool but not for everyone

Students had mixed views about the use of electronic devices and BYOD. Some children and young people said they would use them more, others said they would limit their use or get rid of them.

**“Get rid of byod, especially for the junior years who aren't mature enough to be disciplined about how/when they use it (because it hinders their work in class).”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Move all tests to a digital platform, and get rid of pen and paper learning.”** *(Secondary school student, African)*

**“I would change how often devices were used and bring back pen and paper.”** *(Secondary school student, Māori)*

**“I would change the way we use the iPads and make it so we don't use them so much because they don't help you learn too much.”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

## Make assessments about stuff we need to know

Young people at secondary school told us they want a balance between assessment for credit and learning the things they need to know. Some told us that they would shift the focus from high-pressure assessment to long-term life outcomes. Others told us that they do not feel confident or adequately prepared [for NCEA] and would bring back mock exams.

**“...put less pressure on assessments and succeeding and shift focus to learning and being able to thrive after secondary school.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“...teach the subject not the assessments.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“Get rid of NCEA and just teach.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**“I feel there should be more knowledge on students achieving out of school and a lot more effort put into making kids want to work harder and achieve more in a school day.”** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

One child at primary school told us that there is too much pressure to be perfect, even on little kids.

**“Less pressure on you to be perfect. Let other students look after the little kids and let other kids go to little kids discovery time.”** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

## Prepare me for my future<sup>6</sup>

Children and young people told us that they want their schooling to prepare them for their future – one that reflects their own identity, life goals and experiences. They want education to support them to make good decisions for their lives and not just about learning subjects.

### Help me set goals for my life

**“Make goals make commitment and achieve them to your fullest ♥♥.”**  
(Māori)

**“Make it a different school system where the students and teachers are of equal value and the students can choose whatever they want to do (search it up it's actually a very good school system).”** (Secondary school student, Māori)

**“Work on projects you want to and are interested in and have more time to do it; more opportunities to learn differently.”** (Primary school student, NZ European)

**“Do things that are important to me.”** (Student not in education, employment or training, Māori/Samoan)

**“Find out what is appealing to students and not just the teachers.”** (Student from private training establishment, Māori)

### Teach subjects that are useful for my life

Young people attending secondary school told us they want to be able to choose subjects that are relevant and interesting to them. Children and young people of all ages told us that they want teachers to connect classroom activities and curriculum content with the life they currently live, and the future they want to create for themselves.

**“Prepare students for the future.”** (Primary school student, Pacific Peoples/Asian)

**“If I was the boss I would allow more options for students to take including more variety of languages.”** (Secondary school student, Māori)

**“...learn more things that will help us with our life after school, taxes, parenting, life skills etc.”** (Secondary school student, Asian)

<sup>6</sup> This finding is also discussed further in the following reports: *Education matters to me: Transitions*

**"I think we should be more prepared for real life rather than preparing for an unfamiliar text test (not that I mind I'm good at those but still)."**

*(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"Stop giving us irrelevant information we don't need."** *(Secondary school student, Asian)*

**"...more freedom in what we learn about."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"Open Gateway to more people. Create other courses that can lead to apprenticeships."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"I'd change it so you wouldn't have to do the core subjects (English, Mathematics, Science) as some students don't thrive in these areas and are wasting their time."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"I would allow exams and tests to include resources learned from the year. In no situation in life do you go into a situation relying on memory alone. The current education system doesn't prepare anyone for the real world, only on the information that some jobs might have. School needs to address suicide and sex education, not just how reproduction works."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

Some wanted wider curriculum choices, such as new language options, psychology, and 'new' subjects including Year 7 & 8 options like technology and languages.

**"More freedom in what we learn about."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"To do science and history learning."** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**"Make it compulsory to learn a language and do science to year 11."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"I want to have more language options and enrichments."** *(Intermediate school student, NZ European)*

**"Do more academics and do languages and can choose what technology you want to do."** *(Intermediate school student, NZ European)*

We heard that some young people would change things so that there were more choices relating to early Māori history, te Reo Māori and more opportunity for traditional Māori crafts and performing arts:

**"Include Māori performing arts more and include carving classes and being looked at in a good way."** *(Secondary school student, Māori)*

**"Making everyone learn Te Reo Māori because at our school it was compulsory to learn Mandarin but it was an option to learn Te Reo Māori."** *(Intermediate school student, Māori)*

**“I would make social studies topic more related to early New Zealand Maori history, not just the Treaty.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

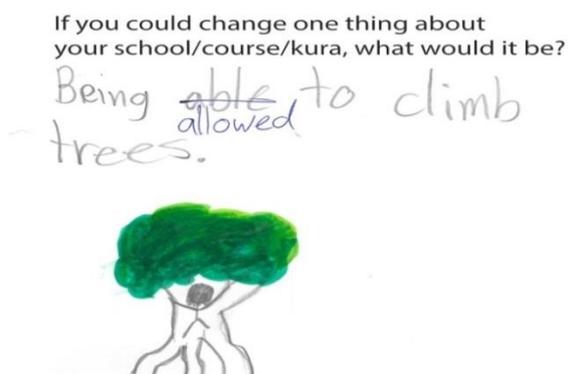
Some young people said they would include more practical subjects, like budgeting, sewing, and general life skills, or make them compulsory:

**“Make finance a subject focusing on budgeting.”** (Secondary school student, Māori/NZ European /Latin American)

**“I would make life skills a compulsory subject.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

Children and young people told us that they value having opportunities and encouragement to play and stay physically active<sup>7</sup>:

**“Change the first two classes to sports.”** (12 year old kura kaupapa Māori student)



**“Being able to climb trees”**  
(10 year old primary school student, NZ European; who corrected her note to clarify it was a school rule that prevented her from climbing trees)

Some students want better sports facilities for recreation and physical exercise:

If you could change one thing about your school/course/kura, what would it be?

Kia tini te papatākoro hei hanga  
whare whakapakari tinana.

**“Kia tini te papatākoro hei hanga whare whakapakari tinana.”** | **“Have more fun spaces and make places to exercise”** (Student in Kura Kaupapa Māori, ethnicity not disclosed)

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<sup>7</sup> See also Finding 2: A better physical environment

## Stop bullying

A lot of children and young people told us that if they were in charge, they would stop negative stereotyping and behaviour, like bullying, racism<sup>8</sup> and sexist comments. Children and young people were not prompted to discuss these issues and raised them in their responses to changing things at school.

### Bullying happens, do something about it

Children and young people told us bullying happens in school and they want something done about it.

**“Get rid of bullying and theft because it makes people feel sad and angry.”**  
(Student in supported learning centre, Pākehā/Māori)

**“I would put more teachers on duty on very specific areas and just not one open area so that bullying could stop.”** (Intermediate school student, Asian)

[I would change]: **“Bullied people feeling left out.”** (Primary student, Māori)

**“How teachers approach bullying along with fights.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

### Respect our gender identity and sexuality

Some children and young people talked about how difficult it can be for them or their classmates who are LGBTQ. Some young people told us that their school needs to be more responsive to issues that young people face around sexuality and sexism.

**“I would want LGBTQ to be more accepted, i get gay jokes a lot and next to nobody knows I am so it makes me wonder how many students get hurt by these comments.”** (Secondary student, Māori/NZ European)

**“I would also make the uniform unisex, so people can have a choice of shorts, skirts and pants no matter what gender they are. ... We should also have a QSA to help the students and teachers understand more about sexuality and gender.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**“Anyone who degraded anyone for having any form of gender-dysphoria, anxiety or depression at a young age and embarrassed them in front of their**

<sup>8</sup> This finding is also discussed further in the following reports: *Education matters to me: Progress and achievement*, *Education matters to me: Emotional wellbeing* and *He manu kai matauranga: he tirohanga Māori*

**class would be instantly fired.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European/Middle Eastern)

**“Make any gender of student be able to wear any pieces of the uniform... Better sex education including consent, all the types of contraception, and different sexualities.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**“I would also make the uniform unisex, so people can have a choice of shorts, skirts and pants no matter what gender they are. We only have one unisex toilet in the gym, but we need more than one in the school. We should also have a Q&A to help the students and teachers understand more about sexuality and gender.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

Children and young people also told us they want sexism addressed in their schools.

**“...eliminate rape culture and toxic masculinity.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**“The sexist comments.”** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

## People are racist to me at school

A few young people described their experience of attitudes and behaviours based on their ethnicity. While the most explicitly racist behaviour appears to be linked to bullying behaviour from other students, we also heard that teachers often make assumptions or respond differently to students from ethnic or cultural backgrounds different from their own.

**“Treat everyone as equals and don't jump to conclusions because of race.”** (Secondary school student, Māori/NZ European/Pacific People)

**“The racist bastards that call us brown kids pieces of poo and baa baa blacksheeps ~ schools need to get this stuff improved.”** (Primary school student, Māori/New Zealand European/Pacific People)

**“Providing basic ethnic/race knowledge and or tolerance (things like teaching kids that the word N\*\*\*\*\* is bad and racist).”** (Secondary school student, African)

**“Treat everyone as equals and don't jump to conclusions because of race.”** (Secondary school student, Māori/Pacific Peoples)

## School is great

Many young people told us that they would change nothing about their school. They feel supported, challenged and loved. Their comments reflect genuine engagement in education and happiness with their school:

[I would change] **"nothing this school is great how it is right now."**  
(Secondary school student, NZ European/Croatian)

**"Not sure. Probably not much it's very good."** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**"I wouldn't change anything because [my school] has an amazing education."** (Primary school student, NZ European)

[I would change] **"nothing keep it the same."** (Primary school student, Pacific People)

**"Not sure, I'm satisfied with everything."** (Secondary school student, NZ European)

**"I don't know what I would change."** (Secondary school student, Asian)

**"There ain't nothing wrong with my kura. It's full of love, support & appreciation."** (Māori)

**"Cool teachers."** (Student not in education, employment or training, Maori)

**"I would make kohanga last all day."** [translated] (Maori)

**"I think I would keep school the same as it is right now."** (Primary school student, NZ European)

**"More teachers (te reo Māori), more P.E. Love everything else about kura."** (18 year old TPU student, Māori)



## Conclusion

Children and young people we engaged with have a range of ideas about things they would change to make schools better. Their ideas are focused on their experiences – such as the physical environment in the school, the facilities they can, the relationship with the teacher, respect among students, how bullying is dealt with, and things that affect them such as their ability to make choices that affect their life's opportunities.

Children and young people learn by doing, by experimenting with new abilities, understandings and knowledge until they master them. This is the basis of the saying 'play is a child's work'. This playful dimension of learning is fundamental to the happiness and healthy development of children and young people. It is also integral to maintaining interest and engagement in school – making it fun. We heard that children and young people want their school to be more fun, have better opportunities to play<sup>9</sup> and explore for themselves, both inside and outside the classroom.

Children and young people are clear about what would help them to remain engaged in school. They are simple things – focusing on their needs and interests, and treating them with respect - in other words, genuinely being child-centred. Our schools need to provide a good education for all of the children and young people of Aotearoa New Zealand. We heard from children and young people that the system is currently falling short. The question is: how can we make it better?

If we really want to improve educational outcomes, we need to get input from the people it affects most directly – children and young people. The children and young people we engaged with in the preparation of these reports care deeply about their education and how it prepares them for their future lives. They have a great sense of hope for what education can offer them.

Children and young people are experts on their own experiences in education. Only they can talk about whether the kind of experience we are trying to give our children and young people is what they are actually getting. They have the right to have a say, and have their views heard in decisions that affect them. It is time for everyone, especially in education, to be more deliberate and purposeful in how we incorporate children's views and opinions when making decisions that affect them.

We have gathered a diverse range of perspectives from children and young people throughout New Zealand, but we recognise the limitations of our reach. In particular voices from those children and young people living rurally are not captured in this report. The children and young people's voices that have shaped this report, and all of the *Education matters to me* reports, are honest and genuine. It is our job now to listen to them and act on what we hear.

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<sup>9</sup> The right to play is enshrined in the children's convention under article 31.

## Education matters to me: Key insights.

A starting point for the Statement of National Education Learning Priorities.

*Six key insights drawn from our engagement with children and young people on education, and supported by the findings in this report. These key insights can be found in our report Education matters to me: Key insights*



### Understand me in my whole world

*He kākano ahau i te wao nui tāngata*

Children and young people talked about how they want to be seen for who they are, and to be understood within the context of their home life, and experiences.



### Relationships mean everything to me

*He āhuru mowai, he ingo matauranga*

Children and young people talked about the range of significant relationships that either enable them to achieve or prevent them from achieving. Many told us that they can't begin learning unless they have a trusted relationship with their teacher.



### I need to be comfortable before I can learn

*Whangaia tēnei manu kai matauranga*

Children and young people from all different learning environments stressed the importance of feeling happy and comfortable before they can learn and the impact that their learning environment has on their wellbeing.



### **People at school are racist towards me**

*He mea nui te hononga tangata*

Many children and young people told us they experience racism at school and are treated unequally because of their culture.



### **Teach me the way I learn best**

*Whangaia tēnei manu kai matauranga*

Children and young people want their teacher to teach them according to their strengths, and unique abilities. Learning content was also important, some want to be learning things that they see as relevant to their lives, and their futures.



### **It's my life - let me have a say**

*Whakatua toku rangatiratanga*

Children and young people experience a lack of choice or participation in decision making about their own lives and schooling. They really want to have a say in their education. They want teachers to involve them in their learning.

**"I would get more assistant teachers for children so more children that need help get it."** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**"Really my biggest concern is that the counsellors are always booked up..."** *(Secondary school student, NZ European)*

**"Make sure everyone gets treated the same way so no one gets left out."** *(Primary school student, Māori)*

[If I were the boss, I would make sure] **"Drivers licence[s] are done. Because I can't get there."** *(Student in alternative education, Māori)*

**"Treat everyone fairly."** *(Primary school student, NZ European)*

**“I'd make MY school a happy and enjoyable place to be, where everyone wants to be. When everyone gets up in the morning super excited to go to school. That's what I want to change, because I know most children wag and don't want to...”**

*(Secondary school student, NZ European)*



MANAAKITIA A TĀTOU TAMARIKI  
**Children's  
Commissioner**

