



# He Iho Ruruku

*"The innate commitment that binds us, our connection and relationship to each other"*

## Ngā Kura ā Iwi perspectives

Māori medium – Learning to learn, learning to live  
in a COVID-19 Aotearoa



---

### **Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa**

ERO's vision is grounded in New Zealanders' aspirations for education and our ambition of Equity and Excellence in outcomes for Māori learners.

Quality education is the right of every child and young person in Aotearoa and is underpinned by learning environments that place the learner and learner outcomes at the centre of all activity.

Successful learning organisations are those that are on a continuous, deliberate and future-focused journey of improvement, using evidence to shape their direction and decision making.

---

### **Ko te tamaiti te pūtake o te kaupapa**

Ko te mātauranga kounga tētahi mōtika mā ia tamaiti, mā ia rangatahi kei Aotearoa, ā, ko te tūāpapa o taua mātauranga kounga, ko ngā taiao e noho ai te ākonga me ōna huanga ki te pūtake o te kaupapa.

Ko ngā ratonga mātauranga angitu, ko ērā ka manawanui ki te kōkiri i ngā kaupapa kia anga whakamua ai, ā, mā ngā taunakitanga e whai ahunga, e whai whakataunga.

## **He Iho Ruruku 2021: Ngā Kura ā Iwi perspectives**

Published January 2022

© Crown Copyright

ISBN 978-1-99-000284-7 (print) | ISBN 978-1-99-000285-4 (digital)



Except for the Education Review Office's logo used throughout this report, this copyright work is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 New Zealand licence. In essence, you are free to copy, distribute and adapt the work, as long as you attribute the work to the Education Review Office and abide by the other licence terms. In your attribution, use the wording 'Education Review Office', not the Education Review Office logo or the New Zealand Government logo.

# Kupu whakataki

## Introduction

### Whakatauāki

“He iho mauri tū, ka tina ki runga  
He iho mauri ora, ka tāmōre ki raro  
Whītiki rukutia  
Ka puta ki te whai ao  
Ki te ao mārama.”<sup>1</sup>

In March 2020, the onset of COVID-19 caused major disruptions to key services in Aotearoa including the compulsory education sector. Māori medium education faced complex challenges, and given the abruptness of the situation, tumuaki, kaiako and boards of trustees had to quickly prepare whānau and learners for a new mode of online learning. Tumuaki and kaiako responded well, given the limited time and resources available for distribution. Whanaungatanga was at the heart of their approach, working closely with their community to ensure whānau and uri had what they needed to begin learning from home.

Despite a ‘digital divide’<sup>2</sup> and lack of other resources that learners would normally need, tumuaki and kaiako reported a rise in learner and whānau engagement in online learning. In December 2020, the Education Review Office (ERO) released *Te Kahu Whakahaumarū*. The focus of this report was on the wellbeing of mokopuna, tamariki, uri, kaimahi, kaiako, and leaders involved in Māori medium education. Of significance was the strength of the kura and their communities to successfully navigate a difficult landscape.

In August 2021, Aotearoa went back into lockdown with the emergence of COVID-19 once again in the community. This report explores the perspectives of Ngā Kura ā Iwi (NKaI), tumuaki, kaiako, boards of trustees, and whānau who had just six hours to prepare, organise and manage the distribution of hard packs and devices in the lead-up to the country’s second lockdown.

- 
1. The essence of care is to nurture the life force of others. The essence of wellbeing, binds and strengthens the collective. Our existence becomes clearer.
  2. Tackling the Digital Divide during COVID-19. (Ministry of Education, 2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.digital.govt.nz/showcase/tackling-the-digital-divide-during-covid-19/>

## Why did we do this research?

*Te Kahu Whakahaumarū* provided major insights into the way Māori medium leaders worked through COVID-19 in 2020.

*He Iho Ruruku* is a longitudinal inquiry that focuses on the second wave of COVID-19, 2021, the Delta variant. This research is the first phase of this study which began in September 2021. It looks at the response of Kura a Iwi, tumuaki, kaiako, whānau and uri as they return to the provision of education online. This approach supported them to maintain working together while ensuring they upheld their kaupapa throughout this alternative teaching and learning environment.

ERO sought to better understand how and what Māori medium leaders and whānau do to support their communities. Ngā Kura a Iwi kura worked in collaboration with ERO to ensure the evaluation insights reflect te ao Māori and demonstrate how their communities use their collective strengths to support learning through COVID, influencing outcomes that benefit Māori.

The lessons learnt from the previous COVID-19 lockdown influence the tumuaki and trustees as they consider the wellbeing of uri, kaiako and whānau. This work will look at the transition of uri to online learning and eventually back to kura with the scaling down of alert levels by the Ministry of Health (MoH).

## Horopaki: The context for evaluation

ERO acknowledges the 12 kura that participated in the first phase of this research and the support from Ngā Kura a Iwi (NkaI), the peak body for kura designated as Kura-a-Iwi. All are committed to fulfilling the aspirations of iwi, highlighted by the NkaI principles that:

- acknowledge the mana that is unique to each iwi
- acknowledge the bond that binds traditional tangata whenua links and that extend across respective tribal boundaries
- hold faithfully to the cultural legacy of their ancestors.

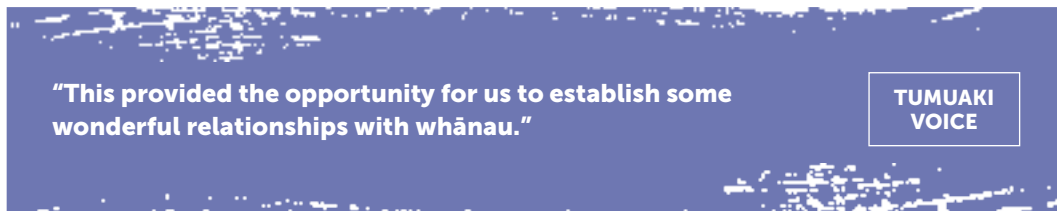
## The lessons from 2020

*Te Kahu Whakahaumarū* found that the Māori medium education paradigm was integral to providing authentic spaces for young learners, their whānau, hapū and iwi to interact; to feel innately and intrinsically connected; to have their holistic wellbeing acknowledged and cared for; to develop their linguistic and cultural capabilities and ultimately be engaged, creative, and excited learners who can stand confidently and as Māori in this ever-changing world<sup>3</sup>.

The Māori medium education sector joined with their communities and networks to navigate their way. They responded quickly to the complex challenges presented by COVID-19 and went above and beyond for learners, whānau, hapū and iwi. The report identified that tumuaki, kaiako and trustees led by example. They demonstrated an unwavering level of care and support to learners, their whānau and communities.

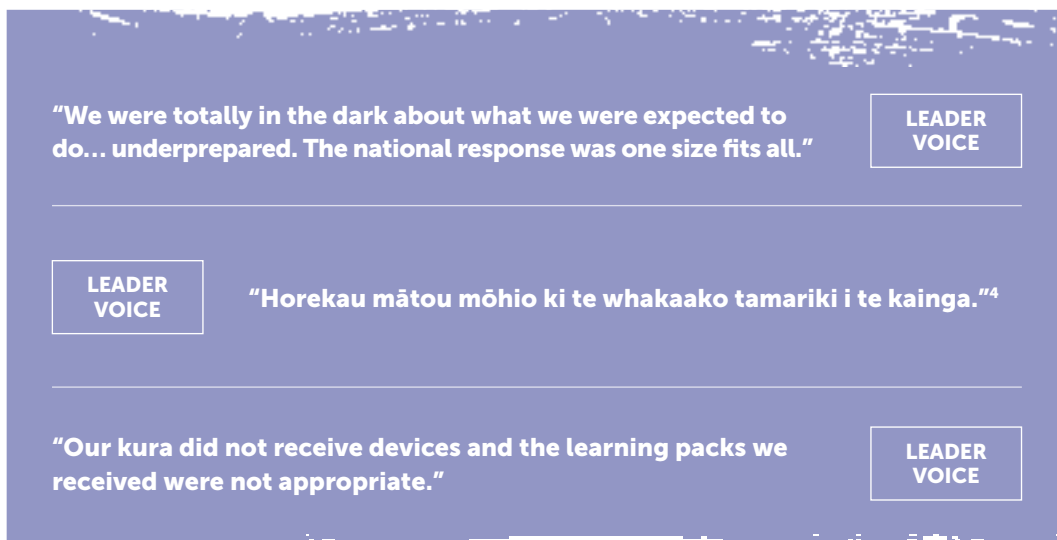
---

3. Te Kahu Whakahaumarū, (ERO, 2021). Retrieved from: [Te Kahu Whakahaumarū – Ngā mahi a te rangai mātauranga Māori \(English\) | Education Review Office \(ero.govt.nz\)](#)



The sector worked effectively to ensure connectivity to support continuity of learning. While there were positive outcomes, these were achieved despite a high degree of anxiety and uncertainty.

All leaders acknowledged that COVID-19 created a range of complex and multifaceted challenges which put pressure on tumuaki and trustees.



There was a realisation that clear communication was important for successful transitions. Some kura identified that the amount of information sent to whānau about COVID-19, combined with news bulletins and the Prime Minister's daily briefing, proved to put more stress on whānau.



Wellbeing was a central focus for all leaders, and tumuaki and trustees worked hard to understand the needs of whānau to provide appropriate support. These ranged from delivering kai, seeking housing for those who were homeless and delivering learning packs to the homes of each student.

---

4. We didn't have a clue how to teach tamariki at home.

# Ngā Kitenga

## Findings

### Influence of COVID-19 2020 on current roles and responsibilities

Tumuaki and leaders were mindful of the lessons learnt in 2020 around wellbeing, and it remained a key focus during the 2021 lockdowns. Tumuaki closely monitored the directives from the Ministry of Education (MoE) and maintained a strong focus on remaining connected to uri, kaiako and whānau.

There was an element of familiarity with government processes amongst tumuaki and kura leaders which created greater ease. Tumuaki were a central point of support for students, staff and whānau. Our findings in this area continue to highlight that leaders in Ngā Kura a Iwi education identify that their success as leaders remains reliant upon the strength and unity of the collective.

Tumuaki and trustees made strategic and influential decisions to ensure students and whānau were not disadvantaged, even in situations where there was a shortage of devices and learning resources.

A pivotal example was a tumuaki in Tāmaki Makaurau who secured emergency funding from the MoE to support the purchase of devices for their kura and others in the area including kōhanga reo. This act strengthened relationships and collaboration for Māori in this area.

**"47 kōhanga reo and 9 kura benefitted."**

**TUMUAKI  
VOICE**

It appears this time, tumuaki, trustees and kura were more prepared. Initially there was a struggle for devices, and learning packs had been identified as being unsuitable in 2020. Most tumuaki took a more pro-active stance to ensure they were ready with devices and learning packs in 2021. There has been an uptake in online learning since 2020 and most whānau now have access to Wi-Fi.

**“Kua hikina te taumaha<sup>5</sup> I was able to gather important evidence from the kaiako and use it to make things easier for everyone this time.”**

**TUMUAKI VOICE**

**“After the second lockdown we developed our own packs and sent these out... these were relevant to our learning and kura. The packs were clearer, and made it easier for parents to help with learning at home.”**

**LEADER VOICE**

**“More online learning – we needed to ensure that our kaiako were up to speed.”**

**LEADER VOICE**

## Leadership

Tumuaki and leaders recognised that previous communication strategies were ineffective and ensured these lessons paved the way for more effective communication. Communications were more organised and well thought through. Some tumuaki and trustees established communication strategies for ease of information flow. This proved to be helpful in their communities.

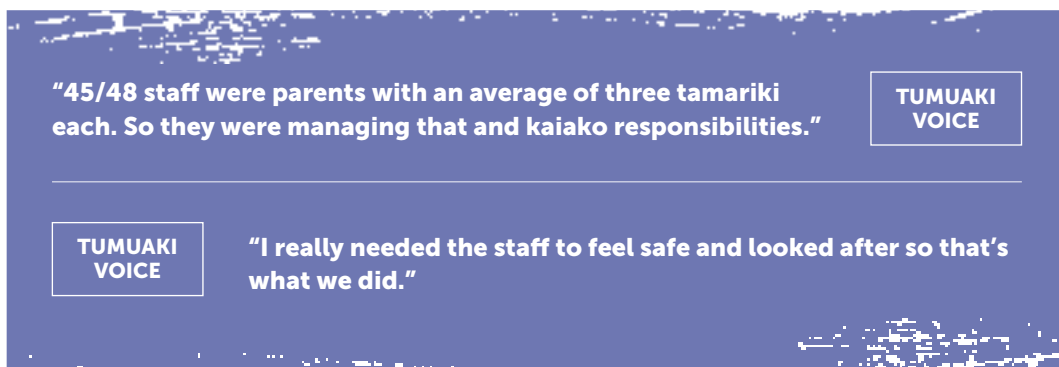
The daily bulletins from the Secretary for Education were deemed as critical to the communication thread. Tumuaki would extract what was relevant and communicate this to kaiako and whānau in a seamless fashion. Communication was effective and regular. Kaiako, whānau and staff were well informed which lessened the anxiety and alleviated stress.

---

5. The heaviness is lifted.



ERO found that tumuaki acknowledged the need to respond to the wellbeing and care of kaiako. While kaimahi continued to go over and above expectations, they were also organising their own tamariki and whānau. Tumuaki were mindful of this and made allowances to support them.



---

6. I would be the only one to communicate with whānau.



## Wellbeing

In te ao Māori ihonui – wellbeing and wellness – includes the physical element and actively integrates spiritual, cognitive and familial connections<sup>7</sup>. All kura reported the importance of ensuring that ihonui was prioritised for tumuaki, kaimahi, tamariki and whānau. In Māori medium education, the tumuaki and kaiako are considered a part of the kura whānau. Tikanga and waiata underpin ihonui for the whānau. Daily or weekly karakia, waiata, and whānau sessions kept people connected and supported ihonui for the kura whānau.

Throughout the research process, tumuaki, kaimahi and whānau articulated what was needed for their ihonui to be supported through the challenges of COVID-19 and online learning.

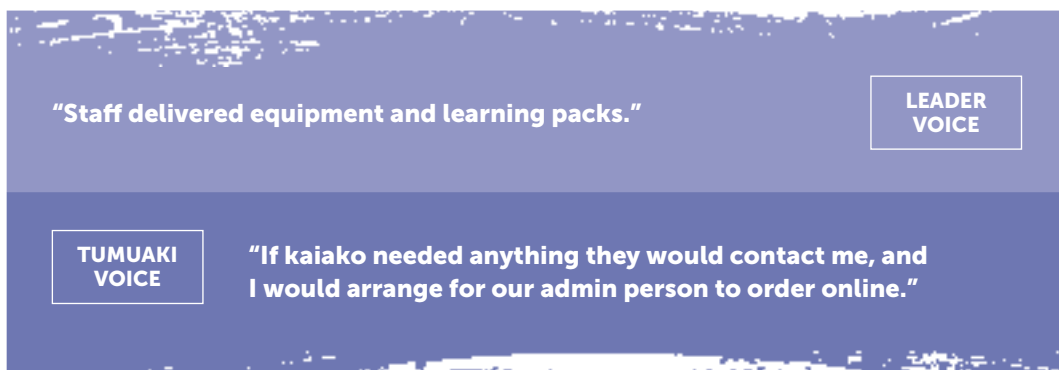
Tumuaki	Uri
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• release time/hours given by board</li> <li>• continued and responsive support from board</li> <li>• systemic changes to address inequities</li> <li>• response to the voices of kura</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduced Zoom time</li> <li>• connections to kura and whānau</li> <li>• tools to learn from home – devices, internet connection</li> <li>• support uri ihonui</li> <li>• mental health support for senior uri who had to manage the stress of NCEA</li> </ul>
Kaimahi	Whānau
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board and tumuaki to prioritise kaimahi ihonui</li> <li>• reduced Zoom time</li> <li>• connection to kura and whānau</li> <li>• tools to work from home laptops, printers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• good communication</li> <li>• understand the needs of whānau</li> <li>• connect whānau to supports through the kura and community</li> <li>• support whānau ihonui</li> <li>• reduced Zoom time</li> <li>• remain connected to kura and whānau</li> <li>• address policies and practices to reduce disparities for Māori</li> </ul>

7. Te Kahu Whakahaumarū, (ERO, 2021). Retrieved from:

[Te Kahu Whakahaumarū – Ngā mahi a te rangai mātauranga Māori \(English\) | Education Review Office \(ero.govt.nz\)](https://www.ero.govt.nz/te-kahu-whakahaumaru-ngā-mahi-a-te-rangai-mātauranga-māori-english)

## Wellbeing of staff

All tumuaki and leaders ensured kaiako were well resourced and had everything they needed to deliver online learning for students. Kaiako felt more prepared this time to manage workloads and made adjustments when needed to engage with learners in a way suited their needs and responsibilities at home.



In shifting students back to online learning, tumuaki made sure that kaiako themselves remained calm. They regularly checked in on kaiako wellbeing because they understood that a successful transition was highly dependent on the way kaiako felt.

Whanaungatanga kept all tumuaki, leaders and kaiako connected. Wellbeing was prioritised and pressure was removed from staff, who were encouraged to take personal wellbeing breaks. The tumuaki role was to provide leadership and stability across all areas of the kura, including students, whānau, kaimahi and the community.



## Wellbeing of tumuaki

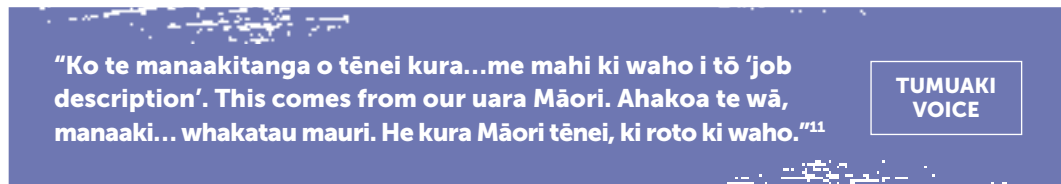
When asked about their own wellness, there were very few responses to this question. However, many trustees reported concern for tumuaki wellbeing, as they were central in weaving all supports together.



8. The role of the tumuaki is to bind all the threads together to avoid the thread being broken.

9. How do we look after our Tumuaki? We need to consider what that looks like in practice – something specific for the Tumuaki wellbeing.

One worrying trend reported across most kura was of tumuaki working to support the community and serving Māori at the detriment of their own wellness. Tumuaki admitted that dealing with the complex issues that arise due to COVID-19 was *taumaha*<sup>10</sup>. They acknowledged their tiredness while understanding that the multifaceted nature of their work did not allow them time to reflect much on their own needs. Their concern was for others and not themselves. One tumuaki described their purpose as:



**“Ko te manaakitanga o tēnei kura...me mahi ki waho i tō ‘job description’. This comes from our uara Māori. Ahakoa te wā, manaaki... whakatau mauri. He kura Māori tēnei, ki roto ki waho.”<sup>11</sup>**

**TUMUAKI VOICE**

Tumuaki are driven by the kaupapa that they serve. There was widespread sentiment that tumuaki are prepared to work for their communities 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## Transitions

### Transitions to online learning

Continuity, consistency, and communication are critical aspects of any learning transition. ERO explored how well students and whānau coped with transitions during this time and what tumuaki, leaders and kaimahi did to ensure as little disruption as possible.

One of the most noticeable changes, was the way whānau reacted. Responses showed the majority of whānau felt more relaxed and confident in supporting their children’s learning.



**“We saw massive changes in the whānau this time.”**

**TUMUAKI VOICE**

---

**LEADER VOICE**

**“Whānau members were quick to contact us asking for devices and learning packs.”**

---

**“Parents got better at supporting their kids at home.”**

**LEADER VOICE**

10. Heavy.

11. Look after this school... Do what is necessary outside of your job description. This comes from maintaining our Māori values. No matter the time, take care of everyone... settle the children’s life essence. This is a Māori school in and out.



Transitioning students from kura back to online learning was more about managing distribution of resources and reorganising online learning.

Tumuaki, boards and kaiako were prepared. Given only a six-hour window to close kura, tumuaki and boards were able to sufficiently prepare for their communities and pre-empt government decisions. Most kura had already organised learning packs and devices. Whānau reported they felt more prepared and familiar with the process.

One kura with a different approach to learning continued working with students online while all other kura were on school holidays. Their return to kura was much later than the rest because of their unique curriculum based on the maramataka.

Overall, tumuaki and leaders recognised the necessity to reduce the amount of time spent on Zoom, especially for younger students. They were innovative and found ways to further engage whānau and students by setting tasks they could do with, and as, a whānau. These opportunities created strong bonds where students could learn together while reducing stress on whānau. A tumuaki stated:

**“He uaua ngā hui zoom mō ngā whānau, tamariki me ngā kaimahi. 1.5 haora noa iho, kia ngāwari ake.”<sup>12</sup>**

**LEADER VOICE**

---

**LEADER VOICE**

**“Ko ngā poniponi i ngā ata, pakeke haere i ngā ahiahi aa, ka piki ngā haora.”<sup>13</sup>**

Kura were able to alter how they engaged with uri and whānau to better suit the needs of both during lockdowns. All kura recognised the need to modify programmes and content based on the age of uri. While these adaptations were not consistent across all kura, the table below gives an indication of the modifications most kura implemented to support their learners in different age brackets.

12. Zoom became difficult for... whānau, children and kaiako so we reduced it to 1.5 hrs to ease the stress.

13. Young children online learning in the mornings and older children in the afternoon eventually extending the time.

Teina	Wharekura Students
Learning programmes in the morning	Learning programmes in the afternoon
Hardpacks given instead of devices	Devices placed in homes and IT support provided for the whānau
Zoom hui were reduced and held in the morning	Weekend wānanga to support learning

### Transitions back to kura

At the time of this phase, Auckland and parts of Waikato remained in lockdown at Level 3. This part of the report focuses on the transition of students from Level 3 back to Level 2 and the experiences of nine of the twelve kura.

According to most tumuaki, the transition of uri back to kura was smoother than the previous lockdowns. Almost all tumuaki and kaiako recognised a need to modify programmes to allow for whakawhanaungatanga.

All tumuaki reported that generally uri returned to kura willingly and were happy to resume learning in-person. Staff provided support for uri and whānau who did not initially return to kura. Whānau decisions were respected when they chose to keep tamariki at home. Supporting whānau at this time was about building a culture of safety as they began to learn to live with COVID-19 in their communities.

Settling uri and whānau back into the routine of the kura was unrushed. The focus was on re-establishing meaningful connections. Kura values remained a major factor that assisted with smooth transitions.

**“We put all the paperwork aside and that first week we did activities to hiki wairua and hinengaro.”<sup>14</sup>**

LEADER VOICE

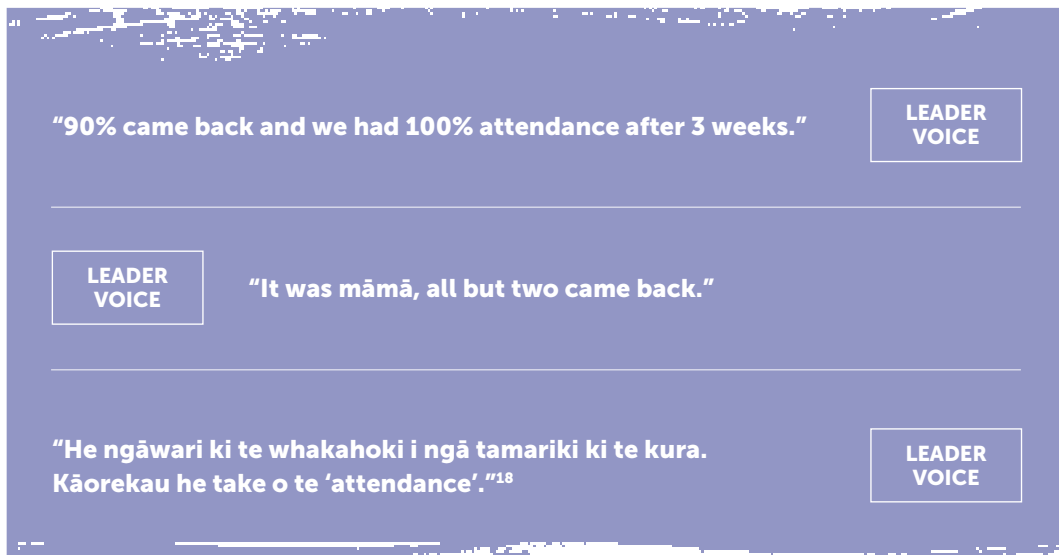
---

LEADER VOICE

**“Some children came back very matakū<sup>15</sup>. I assured them and said you are safe. Kei konei a Ihoa<sup>16</sup>... They thrive on whakamoemiti.”<sup>17</sup>**

14. Raise spirits and mental health.  
 15. Scared.  
 16. Heavenly father is here.  
 17. Praise.

Originally there was fear that many uri would not return which was the previous experience in 2020. This time however, there was a high return rate. For those who did not return immediately, the kura worked actively with the whānau to support their children to transition back to kura.



## Ngā kitenga me ngā āheinga anamata Insights and future opportunities

Kura leaders acknowledge that COVID-19 is here to stay, and all have very clear ideas about what this means for the future. Almost all tumuaki believe they are ready to return to a lockdown mode if and as required. They are clear and understand how to prepare for a future of living and learning with COVID-19. Tumuaiki understand that learning takes multiple forms and continue to respond to the needs of uri and whānau while thinking creatively about ways to support uri success in the 'new norm'.

Tumuaki and leaders ensured that whānau were better prepared for online learning but acknowledged that disparities created through the digital divide have widened since March 2020.



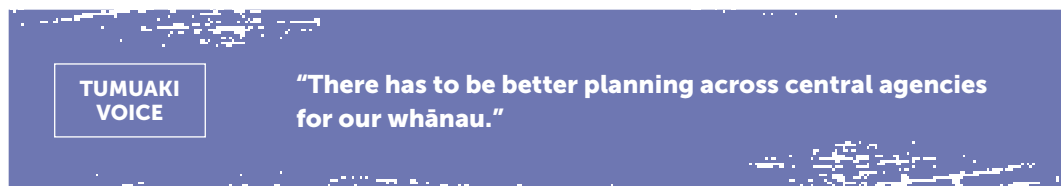
18. Students transitioned back to school easily. Attendance was not an issue.

19. Tackling the Digital Divide during COVID-19. (Ministry of Education, 2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.digital.govt.nz/showcase/tackling-the-digital-divide-during-covid-19/>

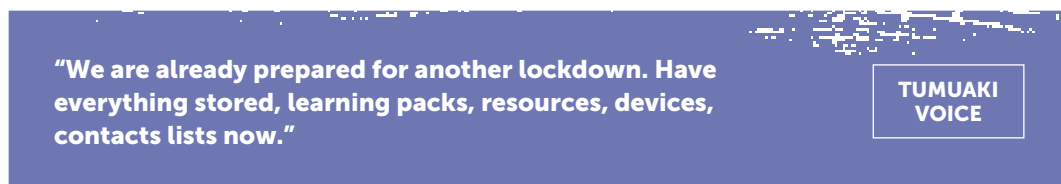
Most of the kura in this research did not receive devices from the MoE during either lockdowns. Persistent concerns remain about inequities and the lack of quality resources made available for Māori medium. A tumuaki who attended online MoE Advisory Group hui stated:



One tumuaki stated:



There was a unified view that the only way for uri and whānau to access appropriate learning packs was to be proactive, develop these themselves and purchase their own devices. This was highlighted by one tumuaki who stated:



In summarising, ERO noted that the future will be considerably different for these kura. Almost all tumuaki believe a learning week will look vastly different. Some signalled a move to a four-day on-site teaching week and one-day distance learning online to allow for smooth transitions between the two types of learning. Another suggestion was for a continued focus on culturacy, linked to developments around local curriculum, highlighting the importance of maintaining and scaffolding this knowledge.

The experiences of witnessing homelessness, poverty, and the lack of essentials for whānau was a common experience by most tumuaki and kaimahi. Through these interactions, tumuaki and kaimahi observed how vulnerable some students are during these times.

---

20. I was bored with the rich schools.

**“Whānau were under pressure because of poverty, lack of food and little or no income.”**

LEADER  
VOICE

Tumuaki are concerned that children will not learn if social issues are not alleviated. In reference to the lunch in school's programme:

TUMUAKI  
VOICE

**“We [kura] have to provide the kai that kids normally get at school, to homes.”**

The education of senior students was also raised as a concern. A small majority of senior students were identified as suffering the impacts of several lockdowns presenting with poor mental health and anxious. One tumuaki shared:

**“They [students] are afraid to sit NCEA because of the expectations on them to go to university. I have a number of students who are depressed and anxious.”**

TUMUAKI  
VOICE

The majority of kura moved mock exams to Term 4 to allow time for COVID-19 restrictions to ease and to alleviate stress for students.

The concerns around poverty and homelessness are compounded by the issue of vaccinations. Tumuaki acknowledged that mandatory vaccinations are ahead but were left with questions and concerns about the wellbeing of their kaiako, learners, whānau and community. There were common sentiments expressed by kura when talking about the impact of COVID-19 moving into the future:

- How are we going to protect our tamariki?
- How are we going to protect our old people?
- What will be the impact on whānau who are not being vaccinated?



# Whakarāpopoto

## Summary

The past 17 months have demonstrated the resilience, determination, and strength of Ngā Kura a Iwi kura to overcome the numerous challenges of the pandemic, and the compounding social inequities affecting their most vulnerable whānau.

By drawing on the strength of their relationships and bonds of community, they have been able to support the ihonui and continued learning of uri and their whānau.

Tumuaki and trustees put in place innovations to support uri which included:

- ensuring kaiako, uri and whānau are fully prepared and resourced for online learning by resourcing digital devices in a responsive nature
- trialling new ways of working – alternate days at kura for wharekura students, students working remotely, reducing programmes to four days of learning, designing the kura timetable based on the maramataka
- ongoing development of learning programmes to meet uri needs to be run in a future where COVID-19 is present
- the development of whānau learning programmes to be utilised during potential future lockdowns
- facilitating wānanga for whānau around online learning.

ERO found that while kura have proven to be extremely resourceful with their provision of online learning, they all agree that *kanohi ki te kanohi* was the preferred mode of engagement for students. Wharekura noted the strain their senior students had been under with the additional stress of NCEA assessments.

A concern for all kura was the necessity of kaimahi who work with tamariki to be vaccinated by 1 January 2022. In addition to this, the current statistics show Māori are slower<sup>21</sup> to become vaccinated and may choose to remain unvaccinated which adds an additional layer of concern for kura.

Along with vaccination, there was a deep concern for both young children and the elderly catching the COVID-19 virus and the wider impact this could have on Māori whānau, hāpu and iwi. Kura and whānau are deeply concerned and mindful of vulnerable members in their communities.

---

21. As at 6 December 2021, 77% of eligible Māori (12years +/all ages) had received 2 doses of the Covid-19 vaccine and 87% had received their first dose of the vaccine.

Tumuaki and trustees identified the following supports required to better meet the needs of their learners when living with the challenges of COVID-19. These include:

- a strategic pandemic plan which provides for living with COVID-19
- upholding the kaupapa and tikanga of their kura
- providing more professional development and learning for kaiako to support online learning
- equity of resources and funds to best cater for their students, kaiako, whānau and community
- provision of funding for kura to develop their own learning resources that are relevant to their curriculum and context
- providing students and whānau with the necessities for future lockdowns such as kai, devices and internet connectivity.

ERO noted the need to address social issues and inequities that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and find ways to reduce the disparities these create.





**TE TARI AROTAKE MĀTAURANGA**  
Education Review Office



**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government