



Education For All Our Children: Embracing Diverse Ethnicities

SUMMARY



Aotearoa New Zealand is ethnically diverse, and is rapidly becoming more so. In schools across the country, more of our learners are from ethnic communities. By 2043, it is expected that more than one in four learners in New Zealand will be from an ethnic community. In Auckland, we expect more than two in five learners will be Asian.

It is critical that education meets the needs of all our children. This study looks at how education meets the needs our learners from ethnic communities. It finds that many learners from ethnic communities do really well at school. Learners from ethnic communities are more likely to achieve well at NCEA and go on to university.

But this study also finds that our learners from ethnic communities encounter widespread racism, isolation, and lack of cultural understanding. It also finds that education is not always reflecting what New Zealand's ethnic communities want.

As New Zealand's schools become more diverse there is an exciting opportunity to look again at what we teach and how we teach. Many schools are already changing to embrace diverse ethnicities, but more change will be needed. This report includes options for change to make Aotearoa New Zealand a great place to learn for our children and young people from ethnic communities.

This study is a Long-Term Insights Briefing

A Long-Term Insights Briefing helps identify and explore issues that matter for the future wellbeing of people in Aotearoa New Zealand. They provide information about the medium and long-term trends, risks, and opportunities, and explore options on how best to respond.

The Education Review Office, in partnership with the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, wanted to understand the education experiences of learners from ethnic communities and their whānau.¹

1. "Whānau" refers to the parents/caregivers and extended family of these learners to acknowledge the importance of their close relationships and connections.

What is ethnic diversity?

There are many forms of diversity including, among others, ethnic, cultural, language, gender, sexual identity, and religious diversity. For this study we focus on ethnic diversity and associated language, cultural, and religious diversity. Ethnicity is defined as the ethnic groups that people identify with or feel they belong to. Ethnic communities included in this report are African, Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern.²

Who are these learners?

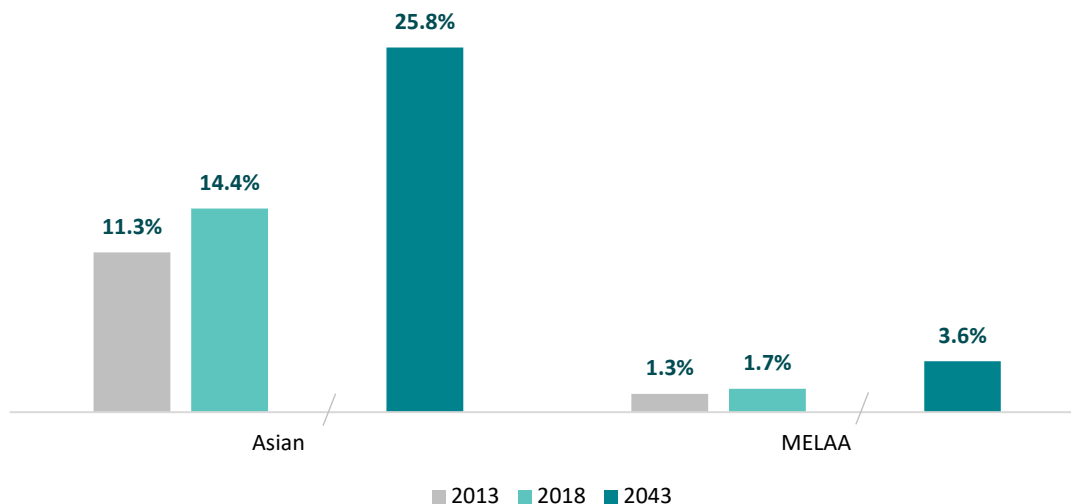
Learners from ethnic communities are very diverse with a wide range of ethnicities, religions, cultures, time in New Zealand, and family backgrounds. More than two thirds of learners from ethnic communities were born in New Zealand. Many learners have multiple ethnicities, and more than half of ethnic communities speak multiple languages.

What does ethnic diversity look like in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, and how is this changing?

Aotearoa New Zealand is ethnically diverse, and this is changing quickly.

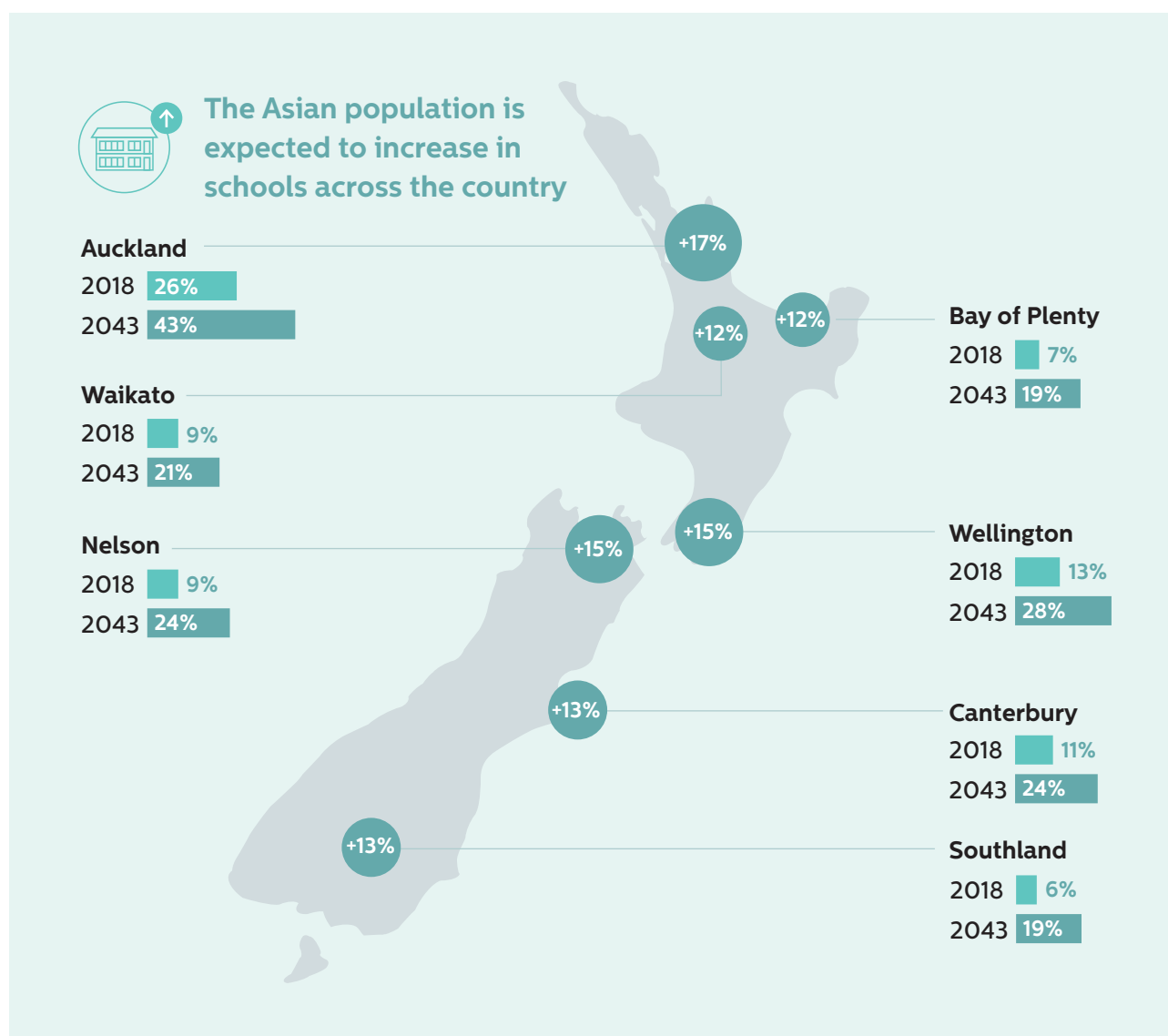
Diversity is increasing across the country, but most rapidly in urban areas. Learners will be from a wider range of ethnic communities. By 2043, it is expected just over one in four (26 percent) learners will identify as Asian and around one in 20 (3.6 percent) will identify as Middle Eastern, Latin American, or African (MELAA). In Auckland, more than two in five (43 percent) learners will identify as Asian.

Figure 1: *Proportion of learners (aged 5–19) in Aotearoa New Zealand who identify as MELAA or Asian*



Source: Stats NZ, 2013 and 2018 Censuses, Ethnic Group (for 2013 and 2018); and National ethnic population projections: 2018(base)–2043, Median projections (for 2043).

2. The term 'ethnic' refers to people who identify their ethnicity as Middle Eastern, Latin American, Continental European; Asian or African. Due to the responses to our surveys, and the data available, we do not include Continental European learners' experiences in this report.

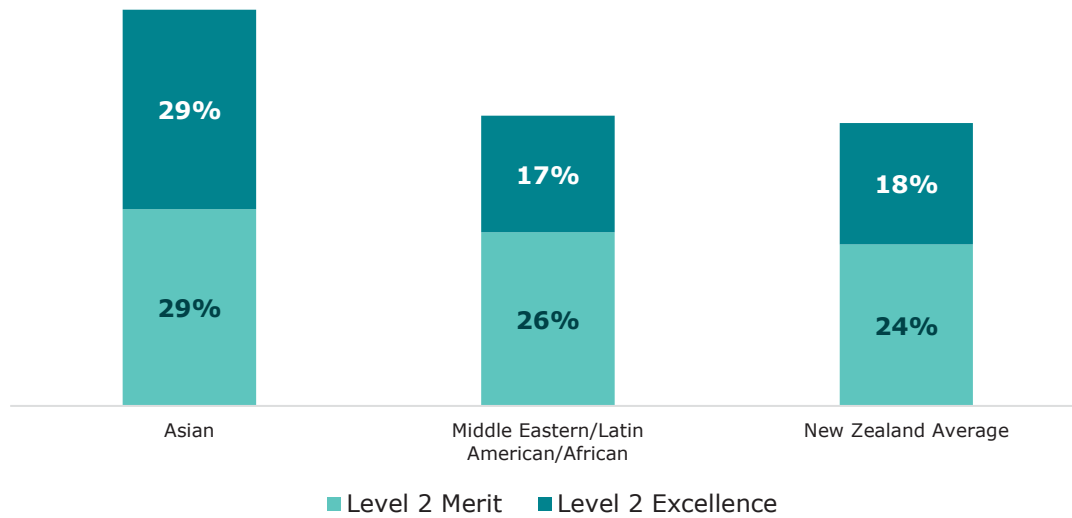
Figure 2: Proportion of learners (aged 5–19) regionally who identify as Asian

Source: Stats NZ, 2018 Census, Ethnic group (for 2018) and Subnational Population Projections 2018–base (for 2043), Median projections (for 2043).

What are the educational experiences of learners from diverse ethnic communities and their whānau?

1. Many learners from ethnic communities achieve well in education.

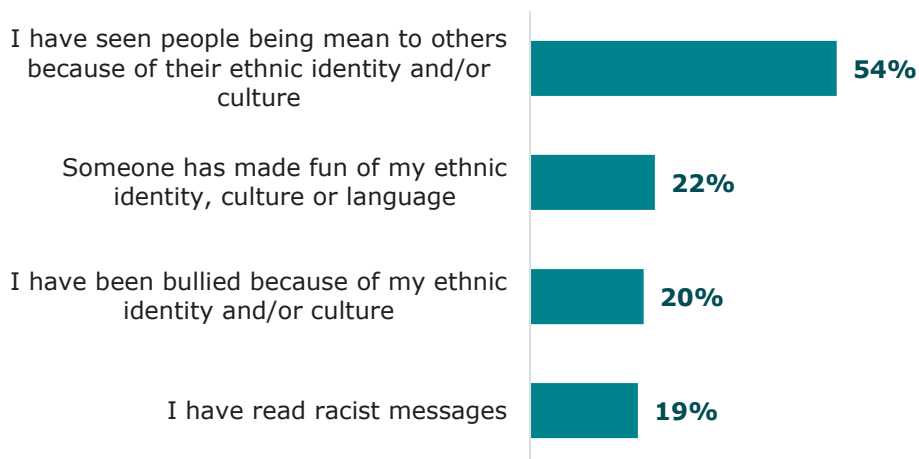
Looking at National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA), achievement and endorsements are higher for Asian learners than the New Zealand average, and both MELAA and Asian learners are more likely to achieve University Entrance and go onto university. However, there are significant differences across ethnic communities, and within all ethnic communities there are learners who are not achieving well.

Figure 3: NCEA Level 2 Merit and Excellence endorsements, by ethnicity: 2021

Source: NZQA, NCEA Attainment by Level 1, 2 and 3 ethnicities, 2021.

2. Learners from ethnic communities experience widespread racist bullying, which too often is not taken seriously by their school.

One in five learners from ethnic communities have experienced racist bullying in the last month, and over half have seen others being bullied because of their ethnicity. Both whānau and learners report that racist bullying needs to be better identified and addressed at school. Nearly a third of learners from ethnic communities do not think their school takes racist bullying seriously.

Figure 4: Learners' experiences of racist bullying and racism in the past 30 days³

Source: ERO student survey, 2022

“I still feel kind of weird taking Indian food to school as you have to eat it with your hands. One of my friends—she is Indian too, got bullied so badly for her food that she became a loner. And she tried to bring sandwiches to school even though she didn't like them, but it was too late.”

LEARNER

3. The overall percentage of responses is larger than 100 percent because respondents could select multiple options.

3. Learners from ethnic communities often do not feel they belong.

Nearly one in five learners from ethnic communities reported they frequently feel they do not belong and a third feel lonely at school every week or every day. Nearly one in five also feel they have to hide their ethnic identity at school, or feel excluded from activities because of their ethnic identity. MELAA learners in particular have very low wellbeing.

“I feel like the only time you can interact with your own culture is culture week.”

LEARNER



4. Education provision does not always reflect what whānau and learners from ethnic communities want.

As Aotearoa New Zealand changes, what communities want from education changes too. Education is not currently always reflecting what whānau from ethnic communities want. Four in 10 whānau from ethnic communities, and nearly a third of learners, do not feel schoolwork is challenging enough. Almost two thirds of whānau think schools should support their mother tongue, but there are 11 ethnic languages – including Hindi, which is the fourth most commonly spoken language in Aotearoa – which are not available as NCEA qualifications. Some whānau also want schools to teach more about religions.

5. Whānau from ethnic communities face barriers to engaging with schools.

Whānau from ethnic communities want to be part of their children’s education. They attend parent information sessions more than any other activity but find information about their children’s learning insufficient or confusing. They are significantly under-represented on School Boards – for example, only 2 percent of parents on School Boards are Asian.

6. Many learners from ethnic communities go on to tertiary study, but pathways are confusing, and, for some, choices are unfairly constrained by teachers’ biases.

Learners from ethnic communities are more likely to go on to tertiary study than the New Zealand average. But for some, their choices are being constrained. More than one in four secondary learners from ethnic communities report that teachers’ recommendations for their course selection are influenced by ethnicity. Both learners and whānau from ethnic communities find NCEA confusing. And a fifth of learners do not feel supported in choosing subjects or career pathways.

“Stereotyping of what particular ethnic groups should aspire to is very limiting and doesn’t enable students to reach their aspirations.”

COMMUNITY YOUTH LEADER



How are schools meeting the needs of learners from ethnic communities and their whānau?

1. Some schools are already innovating and adopting new practices to meet the needs of ethnic communities.

ERO visited schools and found that many were adapting what and how they teach, were connecting with ethnic communities, and increasing their understanding of their learners' cultures and learning needs. However, we also found schools facing challenges as they adjust, that not all schools are adopting new practices, and many do not know if what they are doing is working.

2. Teachers' understanding of their learners, including their culture, is key to learners' experiences at school, but this needs building.

Teachers' understanding of cultures is not keeping up with our changing population. The teaching workforce does not reflect learners' ethnicities. For example, only 5 percent of teachers are Asian. Whānau and learners are concerned about teachers' lack of cultural knowledge and awareness. Teachers report having limited awareness of learners' cultural and learning needs. More than half of teachers do not feel confident connecting with ethnic communities. Half of the learners from ethnic communities reported having their names mispronounced by their teacher.

What are the implications for education in the future?

As New Zealand's schools become more diverse there is an exciting opportunity to look again at education, including what we teach and how we teach. We have identified five big implications when considering the future of education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

1. Every school needs to be able to respond to increased ethnic diversity.

Ethnic diversity is increasing across the country – not just in Auckland – and the largest changes are in our young population. This increase in ethnic diversity in schools is reflected in an increase in the diversity of cultures and the diversity of languages spoken. Every school needs to be able to meet the needs of learners from ethnic communities so they not only continue to achieve in education but also thrive at school.

2. Every school needs to be able to tackle racism.


In Aotearoa New Zealand, too many learners from ethnic communities experience racist bullying and racial biases. And when they raise concerns they are not always acted on. We must do better. Every school needs to be able to prevent and tackle racism.

3. We need to get better at delivering education for learners from ethnic communities.

We need to understand more about what the learning experiences are and outcomes that diverse ethnic communities want. This may include the types and locations of schools, and subjects taught. We must increase the cultural capability of the current teaching workforce and develop a more ethnically diverse teaching workforce for the future.

4. We need to better understand the education experiences and outcomes for learners from ethnic communities and give them a stronger voice in education.

In 2043, a quarter of learners will be from ethnic communities; their communities should have a strong say in the education they receive. Our learners from ethnic communities and their whānau are too often invisible in the data we collect in education, in the conversations we have about education, and in the decisions we make. We need to understand their experiences and outcomes (particularly how they differ between different ethnic groups), and provide ethnic communities with a stronger voice in education.



5. For Aotearoa New Zealand's future we need education to be good for learners from ethnic communities and their whānau.

Learners and their whānau from ethnic communities have high aspirations for their education and value maintaining their home languages. Supporting these aspirations and making Aotearoa New Zealand's education great for learners of all ethnicities and cultures, will help us strengthen our education system, workforce, culture, and relationships with other countries.

What now? Key focus areas for the future

Many learners from ethnic communities are achieving in education, but they have to overcome widespread racism, isolation, and lack of cultural understanding. To thrive as a country we need to change. There are five areas where there are opportunities for change going forward.

- 1) **Ending racism.** In the future, there are options to set stronger expectations on tackling racism and providing clearer avenues for parents and learners to raise concerns when racism is not tackled. We could also have concentrated efforts to tackle racism against those groups who are most often targeted.
- 2) **Changing what is taught.** In the future, what is taught in schools could be changed to reflect more closely what New Zealand's ethnic communities and their learners want from education. This could include changing the languages taught in schools, the way we teach about religions, the visibility of ethnic communities and their histories in what is taught, and the level of challenge in schoolwork.
- 3) **Changing how it is taught (and who the teachers are).** In the future, teachers will need to be able to understand and respond to the needs of a much more diverse set of learners. There are options to develop the skills of all teachers and to provide pathways that support more members of ethnic communities into teaching and becoming Teacher Aides.
- 4) **Changing where it is taught (expanding options).** In the future, ethnic communities may seek schools that match their expectations for education. There are existing mechanisms to create schools with distinct values, characters, and expectations, and options to increase support for communities to do that.
- 5) **Increasing visibility and voice of ethnic communities in education.** Looking forward there are options to more rigorously collect and track information about how these learners are faring, and to prioritise and proactively recruit ethnic communities and learners into school governance.

Conclusion

Aotearoa New Zealand is becoming increasingly ethnically diverse. This provides an opportunity for our education system to embrace this change and adapt so that learners from ethnic communities and their whānau thrive. By 2043, one quarter of all our students will be from ethnic communities. What they want for education matters.

By education embracing diversity and meeting the needs of all learners, Aotearoa New Zealand will become stronger socially, economically, and culturally. It will also become an even more attractive place for people from diverse ethnic communities to live, learn, work, and raise their families.

If you want to find out more about our study, you can read the full report:

<https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/education-for-all-our-children-embracing-diverse-ethnicities>

This summary is also available in the following languages:

English, Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese.

What ERO did

To understand how good education is for learners from diverse ethnic communities we gathered information in multiple ways:

- surveys of whānau (1,250 responses), made available in 10 languages
- surveys of learners (558) and teachers (263)
- site visits at eight schools across Aotearoa New Zealand
- 13 community hui/focus groups
- interviews with 12 community leaders or submitters
- 56 submissions
- online focus groups with school leaders from eight schools
- a wide range of data from other government agencies.

Public consultation guided us

This study has been guided by ethnic communities. In March 2022, we published a Long-Term Insights Briefing topic consultation document, and asked for submissions. In November 2022, we released a draft report for public consultation, held hui, and received written feedback about the draft report. The initial consultation document was available in seven languages: English, Te Reo, Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Hindi, Japanese, Korean; and the draft report summary and the Phase 2 Consultation questions were available in English, Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Hindi, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Spanish, Tagalog, Vietnamese.

We appreciate the work of all those who supported this research, particularly the learners, parents and whānau from diverse ethnic communities, community leaders, and teachers and leaders from schools, who shared with us their experiences, views, and insights through interviews, group discussions, and surveys. Their experiences are at the heart of what we have learnt. We thank you for giving your time, and for sharing your knowledge and experiences so openly and wholeheartedly.



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New Zealand Government

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Published 2023 © Crown Copyright
Digital: 978-1-99-103067-2 Print: 978-1-99-103066-5

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