



# Learning in residential care:

## A guide for parents and whānau

Children and young people who are placed in Oranga Tamariki residential care are among the most at risk of poor outcomes later in life. Education can change that. The education students receive in residence has the power to reconnect them to their learning and change their lives. ERO talked to students, teachers, leaders and social workers, as well as government representatives and the three providers of residential care, to find out about how well education is going in these settings. Your interest, support and involvement in your child's education can make a big difference.

This guide is for parents and whānau of students in residential care. It is about ERO's new report: *Learning in Oranga Tamariki Residential Care: 'They knew I wanted to learn'*. It aims to help you:

- understand what good education looks like for these students
- know how well everyone is working together to help students to learn, and where improvements could be made
- know what to expect from the education providers in residences, and how you can work with them to make a big difference to your child's learning success.

“[This residence] got me back to year levels where I need to be.”

### What do we know works?

We know that students in residential care learn best when everyone involved has the same idea of what good education looks like, and they work well together. This includes when:

- whānau and caregivers are closely involved in their child's education
- whānau, staff and specialists work together to support students
- teaching and learning closely matches students' needs and interests
- students' culture, language and identity is a big part of teaching and learning
- students have positive, nurturing relationships with their teachers
- all adults involved with the students, including whānau, work together when they transition in and out of the residences.

“I like we can...make plans about what we want to do...there are options for our learning.”

“My teachers know me well, and I can talk to them about things that are important to me.”

## What’s going well and what’s not?

Our evaluation found that there were some good outcomes for many students. We also found things to improve and suggested some changes to the way their education is provided. We found that:

- students are positive about their learning
- almost all of the students who sit NCEA credits in residence pass them
- students' learning gets disrupted when they transition in and out of care
- there aren't enough opportunities for whānau and caregivers to connect to their child's learning
- teachers are keen to make a difference and there is some good teaching practice, but they need a lot more support. This should include help around culturally responsive practices to support Māori students
- across the groups involved, there are lots of different ideas about what high quality education looks like for these students, which means things aren't consistent
- the quality of provision in two of the eight sites meant that ERO has had to recommend providers take immediate action to improve provision.

“[My teacher] helps me out. She asks me what I want to do or need.”

## What can you expect?

If your child is going into a residence, that means that they will be going to school there as well, for around 5 hours a day during the school term. An educational programme is also provided in school holidays. Teachers and other specialists work alongside students and whānau to plan learning, work towards NCEA credits and other qualifications, and help students make choices about their education. ERO found that learning in residence can make a positive difference for these students, especially when they:

- help students to feel welcome, safe and comfortable when they transition into the residence
- make sure students have lots of choice in their education, and are supported to follow their interests
- work hard to get students the support they need
- create trusting, caring relationships
- regularly talk to students about their positive progress and celebrate their successes.

“I was introduced to all the kids. I had a mihi whakatau with teachers and students. Then I just joined in.”

“The teachers understand how people are feeling, helping us to understand things that we’ve obviously not been taught and help us with our confidence.”

“My learning is at the right level – teachers know what I am interested in.”

## Connecting with whānau

We found that having learning connections with whānau and caregivers is a key area where things are not working well. In the student survey, a third of students disagreed that their whānau knew about their learning. Māori students were more likely to disagree than non-Māori.

“I think our family should receive a report of how we are achieving. Isn’t it every family’s main priority to see how their kid is doing?”

We’ll be asking that the teachers in residential care and Oranga Tamariki work together to help you get more information about your child’s learning.

Here’s how you can help:

- ask to talk to your child’s teachers regularly
- tell them what you and your whānau think is important for your child’s learning
- ask teachers questions about how well your child is learning, and what is next for them
- talk with your child about what they’re learning
- ask your child about what they want from their education, and how you and teachers can work together to help.

Lots of students are Māori. Whānau, hapū and iwi should expect that teachers will work closely with them to make sure their tamariki and mokopuna are well supported in their learning.

## If you want to find out more about our evaluation on learning in residential care, you can read our reports:

- *Learning in Oranga Tamariki Residential care: ‘They knew I wanted to learn’*
- [\*ERO Special Review: Kingslea School\*](#)
- [\*ERO Special Review: Central Regional Health School \(Te Au Rere a Te Tonga; Epuni\)\*](#)
- [\*ERO Special Review: Te Poutama Ārahi Rangatahi\*](#)

We appreciate the work of all those who supported this evaluation, particularly the students, whānau, social workers, teachers and leaders who shared with us. Their experiences and insights are at the heart of what we have learnt. You can find the full reports on learning in residential care, along with a short summary of the findings, on ERO’s website [www.ero.govt.nz](http://www.ero.govt.nz).



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