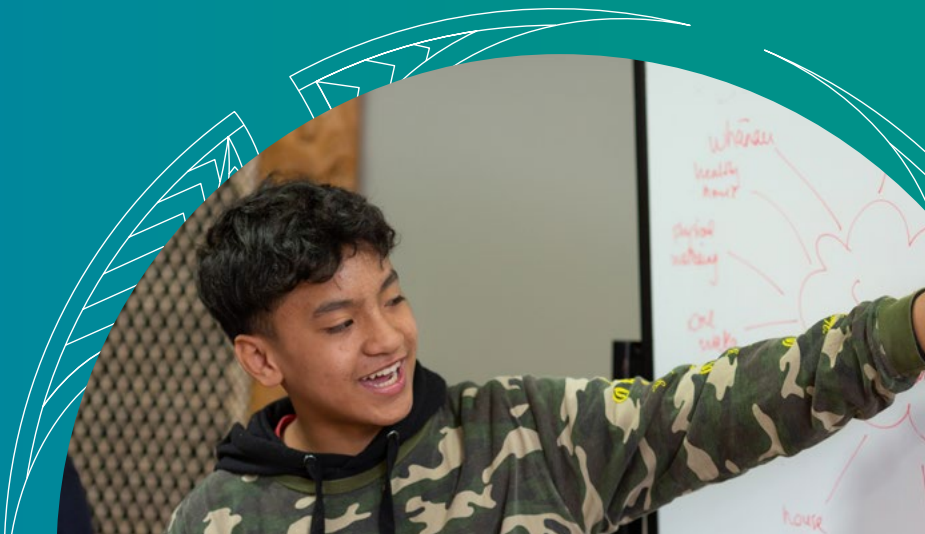




# Learning in Oranga Tamariki Residential Care

## SUMMARY



Children and young people who are placed in Oranga Tamariki residential care are among the most at risk of poor outcomes later in life. The education students receive in residence has the power to reconnect them to their learning and change their lives. ERO reviewed how well education is going in these settings. This summary describes what we found out about the quality of education in residences and what is needed to significantly improve education for these priority learners.

While education is important for all tamariki and rangatahi, it is even more critical for students in residential care. Research shows that students who have been in care are much more likely to have challenges around school engagement, achievement and education pathways. Education can change the trajectory of these students' lives and lead to greater levels of participation in education, training and employment.

There are 700–800 children in residential care. They are mostly male, and 80 percent are Māori. They are more likely than other students to have:

- past trauma or attachment issues
- concerns for their own safety
- low self-esteem and challenges in self-regulation
- neuro-diversity disorders, and language and communication challenges
- behavioural, emotional, mental health and learning difficulties.

## What does good education look like for these students?

These students learn in their residences rather than in schools. The challenges experienced by these students means it takes specialist skills to provide the education they need. Effective teaching for these students reduces barriers to learning, and enables them to develop literacy and numeracy, as well as wider educational and social skills for a more positive future.

## What did ERO do and why?

We wanted to know more about how good the education is for these at-risk learners, and where more support is needed.

We visited the eight sites run by three providers of education in residence. There our expert review team spoke with students, teachers, leaders, social workers and agency representatives. We also conducted surveys, focus groups, document analysis, and looked at achievement data.

We answered three key questions:

1. What are the education outcomes for these students?
2. How good is education provision for these students?
3. How strong are the supports for these students' education?

These questions led to seven key findings that sit across this work.

## What did we find?

### 1. Students in residential care are positive about their learning. Their pass rate of NZQA assessments attempted is high when in residence but they are often studying credits with limited pathways.

Overall, we found that students were positive about their learning, though Māori students were less so. Older students were particularly positive. Students who talked about their wellbeing were also mainly positive.

A common theme from students was the progress they had made in their learning. Achievement data supported the student's perspective - we found that students pass close to 100 percent of their NZQA credits in residential care.

However, we also heard that for some students that there was a mismatch in the quantity and difficulty of work they are expected to complete. Students in residential care sit fewer achievement standards than they do outside residence, which can limit their pathways.

Some students would have better pathways if they sit more achievement standard or higher-level vocational standards while in residential care.

“A lot of certificates and a lot of achievement. [I'm] very proud of them... Before I came here, I didn't know what credits were.”

### 2. Students' learning is disrupted and disconnected as they transition between provision.

The transition out of residence fails to ensure the students keep going with their learning. Supporting students to leave residence and move into education outside of residence is not always well planned by the teachers. Learning needs aren't always considered as part of relocating students and teachers in residences rarely worked with the student's school to support the move. Often students cannot continue to study the same subjects when they move on from residences.

Not planning for students' transitions, including identifying future study options in their home location means that any gains in students' engagement and achievement in residences are quickly lost.

“I’ve changed a lot, before I didn’t care, ever since I’ve been here, I’m not like that.”

### 3. There is no agreed education model or a clear picture of what high quality education looks like for these students.

Across the providers, the social workers, the officials in the Ministry of Education and Oranga Tamariki we saw a range of perspectives on the role and relative importance of education for these students.

There is not a clear picture across the providers of what quality practice looks like. This means education provision is highly variable.

### 4. The current model of education provision in residences makes it harder to grow expertise and is contributing to high levels of variability of provision

There is no agreed model of quality provision. The current model includes smaller providers who ERO found were isolated from each other and less able to share good practice as there were not strong connections between the providers.

Across the three providers, we found that the most well-developed provision was within the provider that was dedicated to teaching in residential schools. With a concentration of teachers and expertise there was much more opportunity to share good practice. Smaller providers, with more isolated teachers, had weaker education provision. In two of the eight sites ERO has recommended providers take immediate action to improve provision.

### 5. There is a commitment to improving outcomes for Māori and culturally responsive practice, but currently practice is variable.

Partnering with Māori is a clear focus across the providers and agencies involved in the provision of education for students in care, however there is some way to go.

Collaboration with Māori was happening at the ‘consultation’ rather than ‘partnership’ level and practice was variable at the local level.

This variation translated into the classroom, where over half the sites were not performing well in culturally responsive practice.

### 6. There is some good practice and some workforce capability to support positive educational outcomes.

We saw some strengths and examples of good practice in the residences: students were generally positive about the transition into residential care, with many describing it as a positive, welcoming experience.

The emotional environment that teachers provided was also largely positive – the relationships that teaching staff develop with students were positive and nurturing.

Sitting behind this good practice was a committed workforce of professionals who advocate for students. This includes teachers, support staff, social workers and case workers within Oranga Tamariki.

Yet, commitment isn’t enough – achieving good outcomes requires consistent quality teaching practice. In some sites we saw a capable workforce and well-developed education provision. However, there was variability across sites and areas of concern.

Teaching these students requires a specialist skill set. Teachers working in residences need to know how to teach students who have experienced trauma, how to support students to navigate the secondary qualification system and how to support students with their literacy and numeracy. Depending on their background and experience, teachers felt they needed more support and training to improve their teaching practice.

### 7. There is a lack of opportunities for whānau and caregivers to connect to their children’s learning.

Many students, and most Māori students disagreed when asked if ‘their whānau knew about their learning’.

Students said they would like more whānau or significant adult involvement, particularly sharing their educational achievements.

Teachers also thought that greater whānau connection would help them to support students' learning. While being in care makes it harder to connect whānau or caregivers to students' learning, it is possible. We did see examples of good practice that the education providers could draw upon. These practices included regular opportunities to meet or discuss students' progress and learning with whānau/caregivers.

“I think our family should receive a report of how we are achieving. I want to make my mum proud.”

## Recommendations

Over the last decade ERO has reviewed education for these priority students and consistently found that the quality of education they receive is too variable and too dependent on where in the country they are. Based on this evaluation we have identified three action areas to raise the quality of education for these priority students.

### Area 1: To improve the quality of the students' education while in residence ERO recommends:

- Developing a quality practice framework
- Making available specialist training and professional networks
- Enabling information to follow the student

### Area 2: To reduce variability of provision ERO recommends:

- Re-examining the model of provision and developing options for a new model. Options should include:
  - an overarching (Tuakana) provider with local (Teina) sites
  - a strong network of providers.

### Area 3: To increase students access to education after leaving residence ERO recommends:

- Considering education navigators to support student pathways
- Earlier planning for pathways after residence
- Investigating additional in-school support for students

Implementation of any changes to the system that supports education of students in care will need to recognise that 80 percent of students in residence are Māori and 16 percent are Pacific. Any solution will need to reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi and be culturally responsive.

## Conclusion

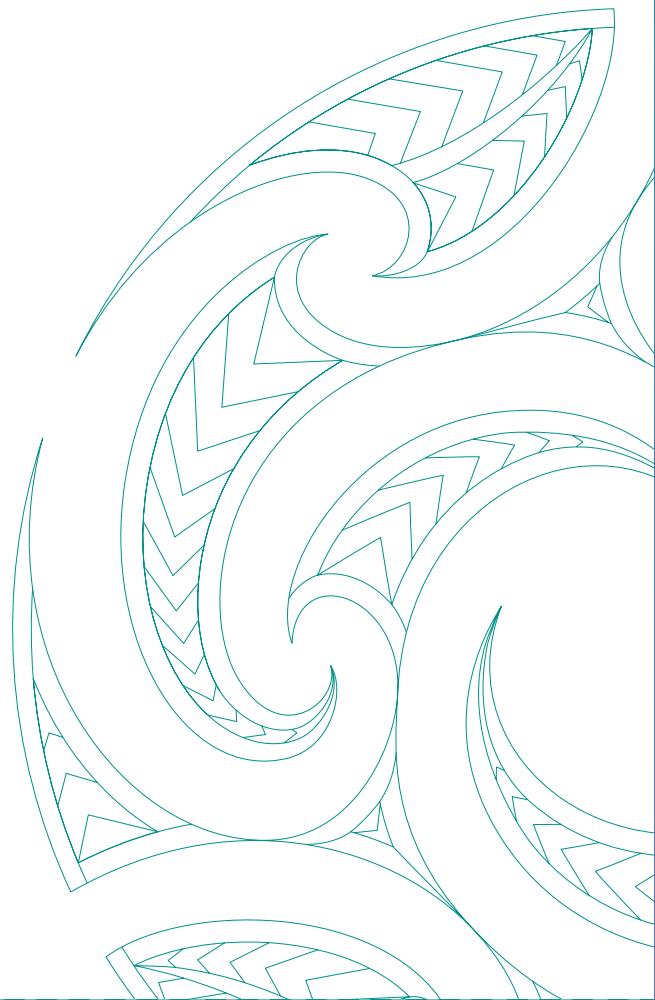
Taken together these recommendations have the potential to significantly improve the quality of education and improve outcomes for these priority learners. It will take coordinated and focused work across agencies and providers to take forward these recommendations and ensure positive change occurs.

Improving education for these learners has the potential to dramatically change the life course and trajectory of a group of learners that our system has, thus far, poorly served.

## 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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