

# RANGIĀTEA OPOTIKI COLLEGE

## CASE STUDY

**The Rangiātea project consists of case studies and exemplars from five secondary schools, each of them on a journey towards realising Māori student potential. The case studies look at the strategies used by the school leadership team and report on the key factors that contributed to lifting Māori student achievement. The exemplars step through how a particular programme has been used successfully in each school.**

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# Opotiki College

## CASE STUDY

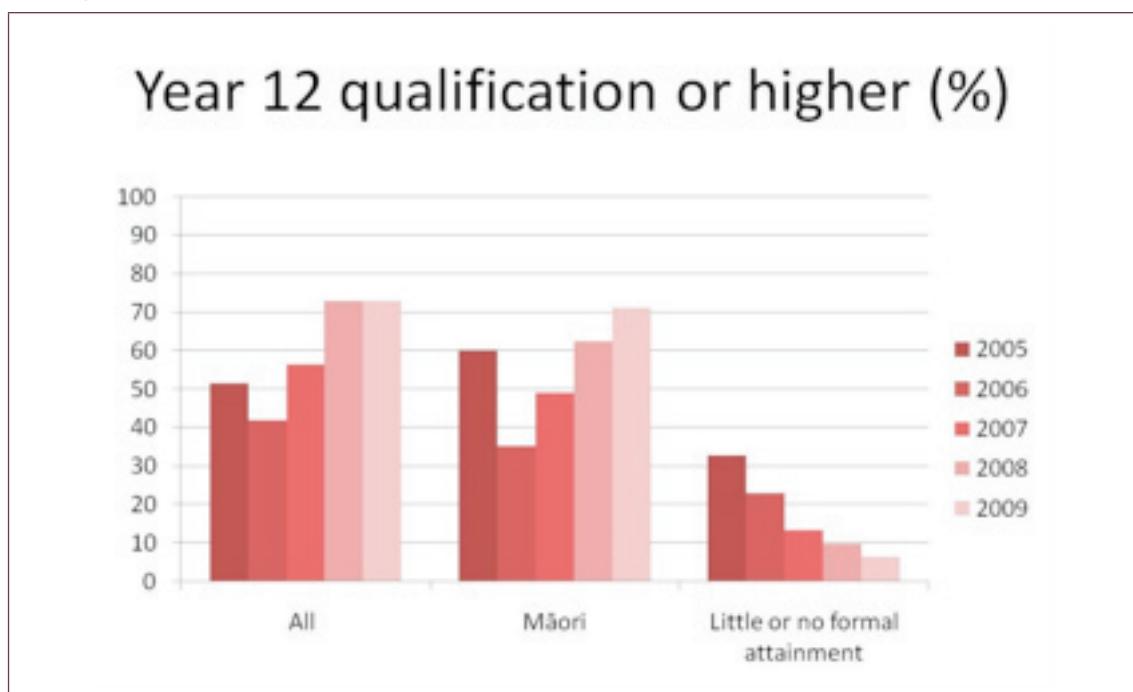
### INTRODUCTION

During the past five years, Opotiki College has increased Māori student achievement at all levels. A recent (2010) Education Review Office (ERO) report noted:

*NCEA data at Levels 1, 2 and 3 show Opotiki College students performing at or above the national averages. Achievement levels are well above schools of similar type and decile.*

Figure 1 shows the progressive improvement in Māori achievement at Year 12 level, from 35 percent in 2006 to 71 percent in 2009. It also shows the general improvement for all students and that the number of students leaving Opotiki with little or no formal attainment has reduced from 32 percent to 6 percent.

**FIGURE 1** Students leaving with a Year 12 qualification or higher compared with those leaving with little or no formal attainment



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

This shift in achievement began with the principal's vision, supported by senior teachers, to enhance Māori student achievement by implementing major changes in the way the Opotiki College leadership team works with Māori students, teachers and the community. The senior management team promotes a systematic and holistic approach to accelerating student learning so students achieve their potential despite any educational, social and economic challenges.

The school's proactive, responsive, respectful processes have built and strengthened a mindset for Māori students and their whānau that success and achievement are within their grasp. At the heart of this initiative is a restorative justice approach, along with an uncompromising commitment to achievement by the principal and leadership team. The principal's catch-phrase—well known to teaching staff, students and whānau—is “100 percent effort, 100 percent of the time”.

The school has developed an Opotiki pedagogy that focuses on engaging with the community in meaningful ways to ensure local iwi are well connected with the school. The senior management team works hard to ensure that iwi aspirations for strong educational outcomes are built in to the curriculum so Māori students' learning is relevant "as Māori".<sup>1</sup>

This case study explores the factors and initiatives that helped Opotiki College significantly improve achievement levels for Māori students.

## RESEARCH CONTEXT

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Opotiki is a small rural town of 4,600 people in the Bay of Plenty. The local high school, Opotiki College, is a decile 1, co-educational college with a population of 530 students from Years 9–13. A large proportion of the students (80 percent) are Māori, with affiliations to Whakatohea and other iwi such as Whānau-a-Apanui, Tuhoe and Ngaitai.

The current principal has been at Opotiki College since 1993 and moved from the deputy position in 2003 to become principal. Believing that leaders need to lead by example, he speaks out publicly on issues that concern him, like the high level of suspensions that were a feature of the school from the late 1990s to 2005. He is passionate about enhancing Māori student achievement. He works collegially and collaboratively with his senior management team and draws input from a range of professional learning opportunities, including other schools. He places high value on developing and maintaining strong relationships with staff, students, whānau and the wider community, and all these groups speak highly of his adept leadership and relationship skills.

The school has been part of the Te Kotahitanga programme<sup>2</sup> run by Waikato University to improve achievement of Māori students in mainstream education since 2006 and has a Bilingual Māori Unit and a Special Education class.

## METHODOLOGY

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Opotiki was one of five mainstream schools selected for the research because it had higher-than-average Māori student retention and achievement for National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2, and because it provided a different research context from other schools in the study as a decile 1, co-educational college in a rural community, with a high proportion of Māori students on the roll. Researcher engagement with the school occurred from 3 May to 22 June 2010 and involved two data collection phases. Information collected was based on the areas the school identified as important to enhance Māori student achievement. An information sheet was provided to all interviewees and informed consent obtained from all research participants.

After the first phase of data collection the researchers developed a summary of the key themes emerging from the interviews for the Ministry of Education, which commissioned the study. This summary helped identify priority areas of interest for the second round of data collection. Phase two of the data collection focused on (a) how school leaders enable Māori student achievement and (b) a specific initiative or approach developed in the school to drive Māori achievement.

To collect data, researchers used a range of interview approaches including individual, focus groups and pairs. Individual interviews generally ranged from 30–60 minutes while focus groups took between one to two hours. In total, 31 people were interviewed, including the senior management team, deans, teachers, students, whānau, pastoral staff and board of trustees (BOT) members, and 28 students filled out self-completion surveys. In addition, the school provided a wide range of student achievement data including variance reporting, curriculum planners, restorative approach analyses, staff surveys and NCEA data.

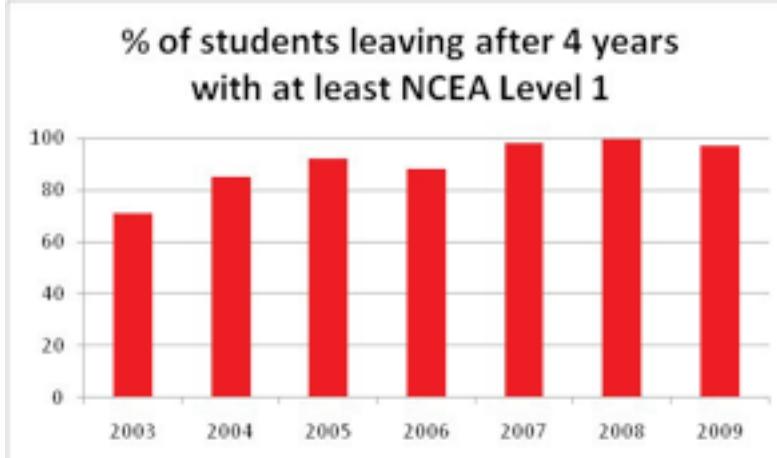
# Establishing high standards and expectations to enhance Māori student achievement

**Every student who stays at school for four years will leave with at least NCEA Level 1**

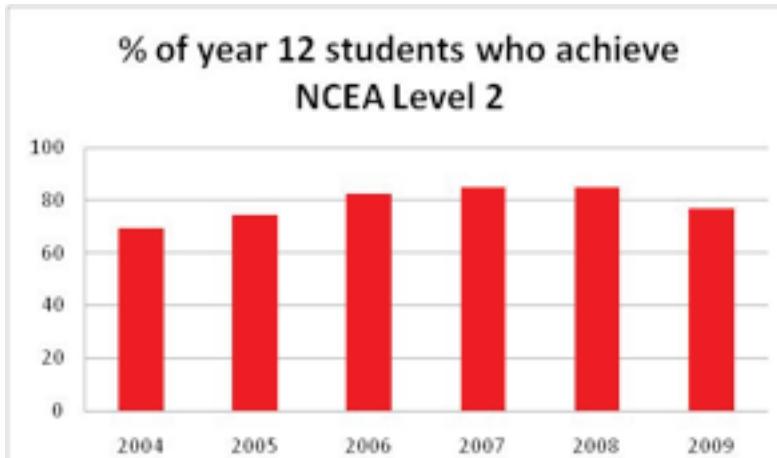
Opotiki College's principal and senior management team, in collaboration with the BOT, have developed clear, measurable and achievable goals to support all students, including Māori students, to achieve educational success.

A priority goal since 2006 has been to ensure that, "Every child who stays at school for four years will leave with at least NCEA Level 1". Having now substantively delivered on this promise, the school is raising the bar to focus student achievement on NCEA Level 2 as a minimum, as shown in the figures 2 and 3.

**FIGURE 2** Opotiki College delivers to NCEA Level 1 student achievement goal



**FIGURE 3** Opotiki College also has high levels of student achievement at Level 2



**Strong, positive relationships**

The school's goals are clearly communicated to teaching staff and whānau through a variety of channels, such as the school charter and prospectus available on the college website and during formal and informal discussions with whānau and the wider community. The senior leadership

**Expectations  
are clearly  
expressed  
and focus on  
enhanced  
Māori  
achievement**

**Goals  
support high  
expectations  
of the school  
community**

team takes the opportunity to talk about these goals in a wide variety of situations—such as the whānau welcome, when advertising for and employing new teachers and during restorative justice sessions.

The principal and senior management team lead in establishing a climate of strong, positive relationships and articulate high expectations of teachers and students:

*We must show our children that we love them, that we have high expectations and aspirations for them, that they can achieve anything that a young person anywhere else can achieve and that their learning is the most important thing in our lives because learning matters.* [Principal's page, Opotiki College website, September 2010]

The following expectations underpin enhanced Māori student achievement within Opotiki College:

- Students need to be at school and in class to learn.
- All students have potential that can be realised when they receive appropriate support and do their schoolwork diligently.
- Teachers can effectively teach all students and particularly Māori students using a consistent school-wide approach.
- All members of the school community (both students and staff) have a right to be treated with respect and supported in their learning.
- The school curriculum reflects the aspirations of the local Māori whānau and iwi and wider community.

The school's goals have developed over time, fuelled by the principal's high expectations of teachers and students, and supported by the senior management team and BOT. Table 1 outlines a number of key goals that reinforce expectations.

**TABLE 1** Expectations and goals that support those expectations

Expectation	Goals which support expectation
Students need to be at school and in class to learn.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• High level of student attendance</li><li>• No student will be stood down or expelled</li><li>• Restorative justice (rather than a punitive approach) underpins all relationships and interactions between students, teachers and SMT and there are clear processes to restore relationships where they break down.</li></ul>
All students, including Māori students, have potential, which can be realised when they receive appropriate support and do their school work diligently.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students develop a work ethic and can-do attitude based on succeeding that supports student achievement from Year 9.</li><li>• All students complete their homework or are called back in to catch up.</li><li>• Student needs and interests are identified and courses that are relevant to students, including correspondence and university courses are offered.</li></ul>
Teachers effectively teach all students and particularly Māori students using a consistent school-wide approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers get to know their students and develop good relationships with them</li><li>• Teachers accelerate the learning of students who arrive at Opotiki College in need of support in literacy and numeracy</li><li>• Teachers maintain discipline in their classes by following the Opotiki College's school-wide behaviour management procedures</li><li>• Teachers collaborate with others in professional development to improve their teaching practice and make lessons relevant to their students.</li></ul>
Both students and staff have a right to be treated with respect and supported in their learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Both students and staff receive appropriate support to help them perform to the best of their ability</li><li>• A restorative justice approach underpins all relationships.</li></ul>
The school curriculum reflects the aspirations of the local Māori whānau and iwi and wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teachers have knowledge of their students' whānau and of local iwi</li><li>• The principal and senior management team has the confidence of whānau and local iwi</li><li>• Local iwi knowledge and values are present in the curriculum.</li></ul>

## **School vision supports ongoing engagement and student success**

Driven by the principal's vision, the school community has embraced a restorative justice approach, which supports ongoing engagement and student success. No student has been suspended or expelled since 2006. In practical terms, this means that the school community, including the principal, senior management team, staff and the BOT, work hard to keep every student at school and to help them avoid educational failure. The school views students as "whole" people with their own strengths, aspirations and challenges. The principal and senior management team believe challenging students requires flexible, proactive and caring responses tailored to their developmental, academic, social and emotional needs.

There is a strong focus on Year 9 students, and students are socialised to expect to achieve from the time they enter the school. Junior Achievement Motivation (JAM) is a programme developed by the school to reinforce the focus on achievement, setting students a target of 25 learning units per subject to be completed in Year 9 before they graduate to Year 10.

The school draws on the expertise of staff from contributing schools and has regular liaison with the principal from a contributing kura to assist in matching the school's response to student needs. The senior management team and teachers develop targets based on students' ability and develop school programmes to support and improve achievement. The principal maintains it is critical for the school to be aware of Māori students' needs and capabilities, particularly when a high percentage of Year 9 students enter the school in the bottom quartile for literacy. Teachers work collaboratively to match teacher and students, based on getting to know where the students are at and determining who can best provide the support for their advancement. These systems help the Year 9 learning teams to accelerate student learning and retain students.

The focus that starts at Year 9 and Year 10 continues through the school years, and there is also a Senior Achievement Motivation (SAM) programme to support senior student achievement. There is a clear understanding amongst students at all levels that if they don't do the work or dodge classes they will be called back to make the time up on a Thursday or a Saturday:

*When you haven't completed a work task [you have to] make up some of the time to help you get your work completed. [Male student]*

Teachers, in conjunction with the senior management team, use the JAM and SAM programmes and other formal assessment tools to monitor student achievement goals and targets. Teachers are highly aware of the educational goals and targets of the school and of their responsibility to deliver a high-quality education.

Two key phrases are part of the school's everyday language—"every child deserves an education", and "it is the responsibility of every teacher to get to know their students and develop a good relationship with them".

The principal and senior management team lead by example and the principal encourages "100 percent effort, 100 percent of the time". These high expectations guide the teaching and learning processes within Opotiki College, starting from the school's strategic plan. Māori students and whānau are aware of and appreciate these expectations of achievement, which are embedded throughout the school's systems and processes:

*It's not okay to be in class and say they don't want to work ... We have to expect the best; there is no other option. It is a culture of, 'You [student] can achieve and we [the school staff] will support you to do that.' [Teaching staff member]*

There are many opportunities for students and staff in the school to excel and be acknowledged. The school celebrates success in academic, sporting, cultural and citizenship arenas. Students believe the school supports them and wants them to succeed. Typical reasons students give for enjoying coming to school include:

*[They] encourage me to keep going in things I enjoy. Support me when I need it. Give after-school tutoring. [Female student]*

*School here is made fun and I enjoy it and make the most of my time/people you're with (different kinds). [Male student]*

## **100 percent effort, 100 percent of the time**

## **Success celebrated**

## **Strong, respectful relationships between staff, students and the community**

*They make you confident in yourself and encourage you to do better and that's why [I] like school.  
[Male student]*

The principal expects teachers to build strong, respectful relationships and the school has clear policies and procedures to support this. Teachers and students are encouraged to take responsibility and be accountable for their actions within a nonjudgemental, nonblaming framework. The school's behaviour management process outlines practical ways teachers can provide consistent classroom management across the school. There is supervision of students on call-back days to ensure these sessions are relevant and to support students to catch up:

*[They] make sure when you're not passing that you come back and try again—and they stay—help. Have a lot of restorative practices. They do help you on the right track. Gives you a chance—JAM day. [Male student]*

The principal, senior management team and many teaching staff have strong relationships in the Māori community, and each year teachers visit marae in the region. Teachers are expected to establish relationships with students' whānau and to attend events that their students participate in outside of school time (such as sports and kapa haka). Further, there is a commitment to attending important community events, and representatives from the school attend tangi when relevant and possible. Māori students and whānau say the school's approach resonates with their own drive for achievement and the desire for their students to leave school with qualifications. This positive school environment engenders pride amongst Māori students about their community and who they are.

# Strategic resourcing that enhances Māori student achievement

**Te Kotahitanga programme supports development of an “Opotiki pedagogy”**

The principal and BOT strategically resource Opotiki College to meet the needs of the community. For example, the school participates in the Te Kotahitanga programme, and as part of this the principal and senior management team commit to improving teaching practice for Māori students. When recruiting new staff, the school advertises that it is part of Te Kotahitanga programme and communicates that the school takes a restorative approach to behaviour management.

A high proportion (40 percent) of staff is Māori—many are employed in key positions within the school, provide strong role models for Māori students and have strong connections with whānau. Māori teachers within the school are an important resource for engaging Māori students, and resourcing evolves in response to student need. For instance, originally the Teachers of Māori Students group (TOMS) was established as a watchdog group within the school, mainly comprising Māori teachers who ensured Māori students were taught appropriately. Now the group also includes non-Māori teachers and the focus has moved to improving Māori achievement.

The principal and senior management team within the school have also driven the resourcing and development of an “Opotiki pedagogy”. This guide for teachers aligns curriculum and pedagogy. It recommends and describes approaches to help teachers gain student respect, treat students with fairness, maintain consistency and “keep it real”. The overall message given is that students are teenagers and they are not going to be perfect when judged by adult standards, but if teachers are genuinely interested in them and pick their battles, they will be half-way there. Teachers are provided with examples of how to facilitate sharing, make connections with students, enhance the relevance of learning and create a supportive learning environment. Teachers are also provided with an outline of what to expect from the students.

The principal has BOT support to ensure there are sufficient resources dedicated to restorative practice. A recent innovation is the ruma whakaaro—a restorative thinking room designed to help students reflect and take responsibility for their actions. A full-time teacher, skilled in supporting students to reflect on and work through classroom and behavioural challenges, is assigned to this room. Curriculum planning and timetabling are designed to accelerate learning for Years 9 and 10 and to offer a wide range of options for Years 11–13. The BOT also resources Te Puawai, a classroom for students taking part in correspondence classes and for students in study periods, which also has a full-time teacher.

Now in their fourth year of using Te Kotahitanga, teachers report they are more aware of how to connect with Māori students, more confident in their ability to build relationships and more skilled in teaching styles and practices that are relevant for Māori students. Annual marae visits provide a platform for staff to learn about local iwi tikanga and histories of tangata whenua. Staff now have a greater understanding of the whānau connections within the community. Māori teachers and non-Māori teachers who are well connected to the community are another important resource. They provide vital background knowledge that helps other staff to work with Māori students and engage appropriately with Māori whānau. Where it is more appropriate, support staff such as the truancy officer act as the school’s representative—building relationships with whānau and students to help break down any barriers that may exist.

**Restorative practices have sufficient resources**

**Staff involvement in school strategic development and visioning is a priority**

The principal prioritises and resources staff involvement in strategic development and visioning for the school on an annual basis. In addition, there are ongoing regular meetings with learning teams across year levels, and the TOMS group. The principal and senior management team each put aside time to undertake weekly random classroom observations (each of five minutes’ duration) and to provide ongoing feedback to teachers, support their development and help ensure school goals are met.

**School offers relevant courses of study for all students**

The curriculum and timetabling reflect the school's priorities for teaching and learning to enhance Māori learner achievement. For instance, all Year 9 students participate in a six-week programme of Whakatohea tikanga, history and basic te reo Māori, which is affirming for Māori students and acknowledges their place as tangata whenua. In addition, all Year 9 students attend noho marae (overnight stays) in the first term:

*Some kids get nervous so it's a way to awhi [support] the students; it builds the relationships between all Māori students and the school ...; it shows that the school cares. [Whānau]*

**Using The Opotiki College Behaviour Management Handbook**

The principal, senior management team and BOT believe it is important to offer relevant courses of study for all students. The school accesses multilevel studies and courses via correspondence learning to ensure all students have the opportunity to access courses of relevance to them. Students have opportunities to engage in subject matter at appropriate levels of difficulty, and there are opportunities for extension. The school funds a dedicated support person to assist students to pursue subjects unavailable within the core curriculum, which it offers in partnership with The Correspondence School and Massey University.

The principal believes it is important to support Māori students at risk of falling behind, and there are quality opportunities for students to learn in culturally relevant ways. Māori staff hold a number of strategically important positions throughout the school. The Year 9 dean is Māori as Year 9 has the highest attrition rate amongst students, and the ruma whakaaro is led by a Māori teacher and has been developed to provide consistent teaching while a student is absent from a class due to a conflict. The school resources a bilingual unit for Years 9 and 10 students, and once they enter mainstream at Year 11 they are able to move into subjects as a whānau group.

Along with the principal and senior management team, a small group of teachers developed and produced *The Opotiki College Behaviour Management Handbook*—a practical guide to a school-wide approach to behaviour management. The handbook provides help to sustain a proven behaviour management approach and helps to systematically induct new teachers into the school. The handbook is a practical guide for teachers about their student population—what to expect and how to deal with students and challenges in the classroom. It sets out the underlying principles of the restorative approaches in the college and strategies for taking a restorative approach, outlines ruma whakaaro processes and includes student reflection and restorative plan forms.

**School–home partnerships fostered**

School–home partnerships strengthen Māori students' learning, and there is resourcing to keep whānau informed and up to date on school news in a number of ways. A range of events support school–home partnerships and acknowledge Māori whānau and students, such as pōwhiri for new whānau and students, prizegiving nights, information evenings and parent–teacher interviews. These events all offer whānau the chance to connect with the school. In addition, teachers attend sporting and cultural events that whānau are also likely to attend as another way of connecting with whānau.

Secondly, there is resourcing for a school website. This is an important source of information for whānau and the community, with up-to-date news on school initiatives, the latest ERO report, school achievement data and events in the school. The principal's page contains thought-provoking items—for example, recent postings are on the potential for student success, the impact of marijuana on students and the benefits of a stable BOT.

# Planning, co-ordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum to enhance Māori student achievement

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The principal, with the support of the whole staff, systematically and regularly monitors student performance and wellbeing across all year levels. This facilitates the planning of a curriculum that is responsive to student needs, with a particular focus on Māori.

**Systematic and regular monitoring of student performance and wellbeing across all year levels**

**Effective pastoral care**

**Offer opportunities for students to broaden their perspectives of future career options**

## PART A: ENSURING CURRICULUM QUALITY

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The principal and senior management team have developed a curriculum planner to collect the information needed to monitor progress, enhance Māori achievement and show the relationships between classroom teaching and student learning. Through focused teacher inquiry, teachers know when students understand the material and can provide for differentiated learning needs. Each Māori student's progress is systematically monitored via a range of assessment tools (such as midYIS, asTTle), regular fortnightly meetings with learning teams across year levels, morning meetings with deans and the ruma whakaaro teacher, and through internal monitoring systems: JAM, SAM and KAMAR. The school also tracks students' achievement and kapa haka participation as it has found a strong link between the two. All data are analysed to identify Māori students who need support, and form the basis for school-wide strategies and approaches to enhance Māori students' progress.

KAMAR is a student information management system that is used by the pastoral department of the college. It includes a database that contains a profile of each student, and teachers are able to input information for students including attendance details, any classroom issues and general information on the student. It is then possible for other teachers to access this information in real time, so they can see how the student was in the period prior. Whānau are also able to access this information from the school.

Māori students maintain that the school provides for them in a number of ways and, overall, they are extremely satisfied with the experiences offered throughout the school. Teachers spark their interest early, and students are exposed to a range of possible career options from Year 9. The teaching staff and Te Puawai resource teacher provide excellent career advice and bring people in from services to talk about their jobs.

The principal is committed to offering a range of opportunities to the students to broaden their perspectives of future career options. Students reported they appreciate these opportunities. In addition, the school offers a wide range of activities and trips away to broaden students' experiences. All the students interviewed had a sense of wanting to achieve, to gain qualifications and "be something". Students feel they are part of a whānau within the school because there is no stereotyping, and maintain the teachers are always there to provide advice and guidance. Students like the fact that correspondence courses are offered if there is a significant timetable clash or to extend their learning:

*I finished Level 3 in te reo and was offered the chance to do uni papers. [Female student]*

Through the JAM and SAM programmes, Māori students are supported early and the school's restorative approaches provide another arena to identify any issues that may be impacting negatively on the students' learning. The curriculum planner ensures that subject content is relevant to a range of learners. The principal and senior management staff also emphasise that teachers need to connect with Māori students and engage them in the material through positive relationships:

*It's not [just] the content, it's the way you teach. [Senior management team member]*

## High expectations of quality teaching

## Observation and feedback to all teachers

## Focus to work effectively with all students

## Expectation of success for Māori students

## Restorative approach supports Māori students to have a voice in school

## PART B: ENSURING THE QUALITY OF TEACHING

The quality of teaching is high at Opotiki College. This is due to the principal and senior management team's focus on students' academic and social learning. As already stated, there is a high expectation that staff will support Māori student achievement. A collegial system of self-review, peer review and reflective practice supports ongoing teacher development. The ruma whakaaro referrals are analysed to identify where teachers need additional support to work effectively with students and in particular with Māori students.

There is a commitment to random classroom observations by members of the senior management team and the principal, who each conduct weekly observations of teaching staff. Feedback from each observation is given to the teacher by the end of the school day. This initiative supports teachers by providing regular and timely feedback on teacher-student interaction and the level of student engagement.

Māori staff are positioned in key staff roles including deans, ruma whakaaro and associate deputy principal. Māori teachers within the TOMS group apply their knowledge to team discussions to broker relationships. The school values their expertise in te reo Māori, tikanga and their community connections.

Students experiencing difficulty are identified early through regular assessment, restorative approaches and through regular staff hui. The principal, the senior management team, deans and learning year teams all work together to support teachers and each other to work effectively with the students. The school does everything in its power to help Māori students realise their potential. For example, at times students are moved to another class or take time out from a teacher. If well-connected staff within the school hear of an incident in a whānau, they quietly inform the student's teacher so the teacher can respond to the student appropriately and this helps to facilitate relationships between whānau and the school:

*We all play our part to support ... Through building rapport it can break down barriers and you get whānau coming into the school grounds who wouldn't normally ... They come because they know we care and we won't give up.* [Teaching staff member]

There is high expectation from all the teachers that Māori students can be successful. Students say:

*They don't expect less of you because you're Māori ... they want you to be the best you can be.*  
[Male student]

All staff, from the principal and senior management team to support staff, are aware of their responsibilities in advancing Māori students' academic and social learning. Teachers are very aware of their responsibility to keep students in class and teach:

*You just don't give up.* [Student]

The restorative approach is reviewed each term—the students sent from classes, the number of times and the teachers involved are all identified. This review challenges the teachers to reflect on their behaviour management strategies and also provides support and identifies areas for further professional development or learning for teachers. In the case where teachers appear to be repeatedly sending students from class, support is given by the principal and senior management team to restore relationships between student and teacher. At times, behaviour management techniques or strategies are suggested to teachers.

The restorative approach supports Māori students to have a voice in school. A three-way conversation between the teacher, dean and student occurs where all parties are encouraged to take responsibility for their own part in the incident. At times, this results in teachers apologising for their behaviour—as well as students.

# Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development that enhances Māori student achievement

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## Continual reporting, feedback and monitoring, including analysis of variance reporting

To examine Māori student achievement patterns and plan professional learning priorities, the senior management team uses continual reporting, feedback and monitoring including analysis of variance reporting, NCEA results data, midYIS, asTTle and teaching inquiry strategies. Māori student achievement patterns are analysed to assess how to better meet the needs of students and identify where and how improvements can be made. This approach led to the development of learning teams for year levels, ruma whakaaro and learning communities.

Te Kotahitanga and restorative approaches within the school provide forums to discuss the need for changes to teaching practices and the importance of this for Māori. Evolving practice to enhance Māori achievement is a constant conversation. At the beginning of each year, the principal and senior management team refocus teachers to consider how the whole school might respond to Māori students' needs to enhance Māori student achievement. Te Kotahitanga is the professional development yardstick adopted by the school and teaching reviews focus on the impact teachers' professional development has on Māori students.

The principal reports regularly on Māori student results to teaching staff, whānau and the BOT. Newsletters and the website have up-to-date information available on Māori achievement compared against the national student achievement data. The principal also has a blog site where he communicates achievement results. Frequent sharing of achievement data informs the development of effective teaching strategies and responses to Māori students.

As the school is 80 percent Māori, each team meeting essentially discusses teaching and learning for Māori. TOMS looks specifically at improving Māori achievement. The school ethos is "what is good for Māori is good for all" and focuses on connecting and developing relationships with Māori students.

The principal believes professional development and ongoing learning are critical to improve Māori achievement and to support staff to develop skills, "not rest on their laurels". Every three weeks there are professional learning group meetings across curricula that reflect on how to be effective in a diverse classroom, the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum* and teaching as inquiry. There is also an aspiring leaders group of 12 to 14 staff volunteers, who regularly meet to discuss the big issues such as pedagogy.

Teachers are encouraged to develop their knowledge and skills, not only to teach academic components of the curriculum but also to relate well with Māori students and build effective relationships with them. This is considered vital—and supports teachers to withstand the challenges of teaching diverse learners who have their own opinions, challenges and needs.

## Constant professional development—teachers are skilled professionals

# Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment enhances Māori student achievement

## Opotiki-flavoured restorative justice approach

## Problems between teachers and Māori students are resolved in a fair and timely way

## School acknowledges the importance of Māori student and whānau views

## With a positive environment, the school competes with the best in the country

An Opotiki-flavoured restorative justice approach facilitates the safety of both students and staff. The principal's vision, with support from the senior management team and BOT, ensures an inclusive approach for students that also supports teachers. Very clear strategies are in place for dealing with behaviour. At times when teachers genuinely feel unsafe, the principal and senior management team take these anxieties seriously by "really listening to the concerns and putting measures in place to alleviate any issues". In the past, during periods of high tension, teachers were supplied with walkie talkies while on duty, and the principal took an active role on duty at those times.

At particularly challenging times, staff are encouraged to develop particular learning groups or initiatives to improve the school culture. TOMS was one such group originally established because of Māori teachers' concerns about teachers' interaction with Māori students.

The restorative approach ensures that any problems between teachers and Māori students are resolved in a fair and timely way. Teachers and students are encouraged to take responsibility for how their behaviour may have resulted in a conflict and then work together with the dean to develop a plan to work with each other more effectively. In situations where resolution is slow, the principal or senior management team step in to facilitate a way forward.

Restorative practices are embedded in the school, and an information booklet clearly communicates the process to whānau, students and teachers. The principal believes it is vital to have a consistent approach to enhance Māori achievement that includes a nonblaming environment. Staff work with each other restoratively, and all interactions with the principal also take this approach.

Deans initiate the restorative process where there are Māori student behaviour issues. Generally, an issue is resolved within three days. The principal also takes a hands-on role to support staff when they have difficulties with a student. The principal provides professional advice about teaching styles and suggests different responses that might be possible, given the student's personality and needs.

The school acknowledges the importance of Māori student views. The restorative process seeks student opinions and feelings, acknowledging these are crucial to enable resolution between teacher and student. The principal also talks honestly and openly with students in cases of lack of attendance. He really listens to the issues and challenges that the student may be up against—and works towards breaking down the barriers for them. Analysis of students who get a lot of blues<sup>3</sup> shows that there are only a very few students who have serious barriers to learning.

Those whānau spoken to during this study commented that the principal and deputy principal are approachable and easy to discuss problems with. Whānau believe the principal and deputy principal can and will resolve problems satisfactorily for whānau. Whānau spoken to as part of this study are generally aware of school policies and know why they are in place.

The school is positive and acknowledges all success and achievement of students, including Māori, through regular assembly and celebrations. Students are also rewarded with a "reddy" (a red form) for good attendance, completing work and general good behaviour. While academic success is important, the school sees the success of students based on the whole person—which may include success in sports, arts and cultural pursuits. Students are proud of the school and the contributions students are able to make in a number of arenas throughout New Zealand:

*Just because we are [from] a little Māori town, don't underestimate us. We compete with the best in the country. [Female student]*

The school has had two national champion touch rugby teams, and was the regional kapa haka winner in 2009. Throughout 2008 and 2009, 20 Opotiki College students represented the Bay of Plenty region in sport; while in 2009 the school's First 15 rugby team was third best in New Zealand. Opotiki College students also participated successfully in national stage challenge and kapa haka events. The school shows visible signs of student success with trophies and photo records on display in prominent places. The school also uses its website to share and celebrate student success with the wider community.

# Ensuring educationally powerful connections with Māori whānau and the Māori community enhances Māori student achievement

**Authentic and genuinely good relationships exist between the school and the Māori community**

**Whānau feel valued and that the school cares about their students**

**Whānau are welcome at school and encouraged to learn about and understand the achievement levels of their children**

The school has multilayered relationships with Māori whānau and iwi. The principal and senior management team have developed authentic and genuinely good relationships with local marae and kaumātua, as well as with contributing schools. Whānau actively monitor success and provide direction for ongoing development of the bilingual unit.

The school and Māori community aim to enhance outcomes for Māori students in all areas of their lives, not just academic achievement. Success in sports, arts, culture and citizenship are also promoted and prized. The whole person is considered to be important, as well as the underlying relationships and connections between people. Many of the teachers in the school are also close relatives of the students—school staff are encouraged to be active in the community and attend sport, cultural events and tangi.

Whānau feel valued in terms of what they bring to the school (such as knowledge of children, kaupapa Māori). The school clearly communicates with parents about students' requirements to learn and provides a simple list of the right tools for student learning (such as pen, paper, positive attitude and uniform). The school uses a range of culturally appropriate processes to engage with whānau in a way that resonates positively with them, including the use of whakawhanaungatanga, pōwhiri and manaakitanga.<sup>4</sup> The college also offers a bilingual option for students up to Year 11. Opotiki College has participated in Te Kotahitanga for the past four years—with the overall aim to improve the educational achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms. Teachers demonstrate on a daily basis that they care for the students as culturally located individuals and have high expectations of student learning. Whānau feel that the school cares about their students—"They do things our kids are familiar with, which makes them feel safe and comfortable." The school runs a school-wide wananga<sup>5</sup> across Years 9–13. The teachers run this in houses, and students have the option to become involved in different projects:

*I love the wananga and so does our girl ... It really supports tuakana-teina relationships.*  
*[Whānau]*

Whānau feel they have opportunities to comment on their child's learning. They also feel that Māori perspectives and views are valued and that they can contribute to curriculum and school practices. From the perspective of whānau, there are excellent opportunities for teacher contact and whānau feel they are able to enter their student's classroom at any time. The JAM and SAM programmes provide parents with regular information on how their children are achieving. Parents also use email to communicate with teachers.

The school is open to whānau suggestions—for instance, it allows students to undertake te reo at a higher level than the school offers. The school has also developed a performing arts assessment for kapa haka and offers correspondence courses for subjects with low student numbers.

Parents are encouraged to learn about and understand the achievement levels of their children in relation to national benchmarks. The school's achievement levels are presented on the school website, in the school prospectus and in local newspapers following NCEA results. In Year 10, the school holds a hui for parents where they are informed about NCEA, how it works and possible subject options. Parents are encouraged to consider what their teenagers are passionate about and how they might apply that passion to develop a career pathway when selecting subjects for NCEA.

The principal is open and genuine and has developed good relationships with tumuaki (principals) of local kura kaupapa. News of past students is regularly passed back to kura.

# Engaging in constructive problem talk enhances Māori student achievement

**Foundations  
for school  
decisions  
are built on  
regular, open  
communication  
with staff and  
knowing the  
students**

**Principal has  
a vision and  
helps staff and  
the community  
see where they  
fit into the big  
picture**

**Principal is  
open minded**

The principal and senior leadership team make important school decisions based on research and information that suggest the likely impact on teaching and learning. As the school leader, the principal is informed through research, and attending workshops, seminars and conferences. The senior management team members are also encouraged to involve themselves in initiatives that will have long-term positive impacts on the school environment. The foundations for school decisions are built on regular, open communication with staff and a determined effort to get to know the students. The principal acknowledges that research can only take you so far, and at some point, “you have to fly the plane while building it”.

The principal is involved in all learning that staff undertake and actively participates in any initiatives that are established. As the principal notes:

*You must walk the talk, and if I am asking my staff to do something then I have to be doing it too—every day. [Principal]*

The principal is committed to the school and the interests of students, whānau and staff, focusing on Māori student achievement. His enthusiasm and care for the students is contagious, and when onsite it is easy for an observer to see his excellent relationships with students and staff. All staff, students and whānau indicated that the principal was approachable, “a man of his word”, and an excellent leader who is driven by his care of students and the belief that every student has the right to a high-quality education.

The principal leads discussions when concerns arise, and he reinforces the overall goals and vision of the school. He has learnt to bring people into his vision and help staff and community see where they fit into the big picture. Restorative practices guide responses to conflicts at all levels, and the practice is so embedded that staff pull the principal up on occasions when his language is not restorative. As a leader, he believes that you have to be 100 percent committed to the kaupapa of the school—what you are asking of the students you must give and show to them and then they respond in a similar way:

*It is about leading by example. [Principal]*

Values and beliefs that guide leadership within the school include: the school has a responsibility to make students feel valued and cared for; there is a need for a pastoral care element in all teaching; and values such as manaakitanga and a concern and empathy for all staff are critical.

Students, whānau and teachers respect the principal’s ability to maintain integrity and provide positive leadership in challenging situations. In all situations, he is very clear about who he is and what is important. The principal acknowledges that there have been challenges along the way but he believes that by remembering “it is all about the students” he is able to refocus and move forward.

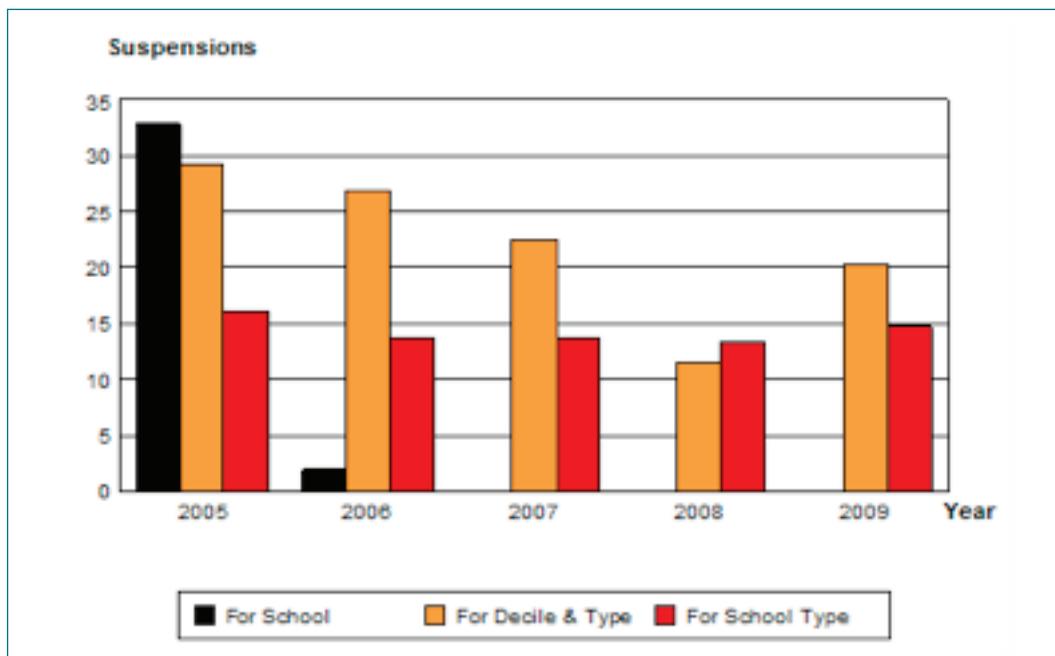
The principal is kind, will listen, is always available to discuss concerns and is open to being challenged. He will consider a staff issue and then hold a staff hui with an open forum to find solutions. He takes advice and makes changes that are important to others. The principal has earned the respect of staff through being firm but fair, leading by example and providing real opportunities for a difference of opinions to be raised and resolved. For instance, during a restorative practice review a section detailed (without using names) how many times teachers had issued bluies. It became apparent that a few teachers were responsible for a disproportionate number of the bluies. As this did not reflect particularly well on these teachers, this section was removed from the report. However, the principal still took action by individually supporting those teachers to help them reduce the number of bluies given but they were not publicly identified.

## **Principal seeks high-quality information about situations before making a decision**

The principal is a regular face and presence at many community events (such as fishing competitions and multisport events), and whānau feel able to approach him and the school. While the researchers were onsite, a whānau came in to give the principal a photo of their daughter who had graduated from university and thank him for his support. In the photo, their daughter held up a sign that said, “100 percent effort, 100 percent of the time”.

The principal seeks high-quality information about situations before making a decision. Serious deliberation and consultation with all interested parties is carried out and, where relevant, the senior management team, the BOT, whānau and students are involved in decision making. Staff are involved in the visioning of the school through a strategic planning process. The principal models the behaviour expected from the students—he listens, considers others’ points of view and tries to learn from mistakes. The restorative approach within the school assists students’ social learning. It helps them see where they went wrong, helps them to repair relationships by saying sorry (if that is needed) and helps them make plans to move forward.

**FIGURE 4 Suspensions per 1,000 students at Opotiki College**



Source: Ministry of Education School SMART website data

## **Principal is prepared to assert non-negotiables**

When initiating new strategies, the principal is prepared to assert “non-negotiables”—which act as a directive, motivator and bottom line for teachers, whānau and students. One such statement is that no student will be suspended from the school, which implies that the staff have to do all they can for the student and not give up on them. The school has excellent follow through and ensures that systems are developed, used and maintained, and consequences occur as intended. So, in the case of JAM assessments, for instance, one Year 9 student was unable to progress to Year 10 as they had not achieved the required 25 Year 9 credits.

At times, school policies and procedures mean the principal has difficult discussions and courageous conversations with whānau and staff. However, by remaining honest, open and refocusing the conversation on the wellbeing of the student, the principal is able to work through issues and build better, healthier relationships with students and their whānau. For instance, in one case, a whānau who went through a restorative process moved on to play a supportive role in the school coaching sport.

## **Principal works through issues to build better, healthier relationships with students and their whānau**

# SELECTING, DEVELOPING AND USING SMART TOOLS TO ENHANCE MĀORI STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Through this case study, it is apparent that Opotiki College uses a number of smart tools to address student engagement, motivation and achievement. These include:

- documents such as *The Opotiki College Behaviour Management Handbook*—a practical guide to school-wide behaviour management that details key aspects of relationships and ways to achieve them
- use of KAMAR to document and track students and support pastoral care
- use of restorative justice approach and issuing of bluies and reddys to motivate student engagement.

## FURTHER READINGS

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The research team is grateful for the time and contribution of both students and whānau who spoke with them and trusted that their experiences within the school would be represented accurately. Students engaged in the research process with maturity and expressed their hopes that their own successful experiences would improve education for Māori throughout Aotearoa.

We would also like to acknowledge the support of the Professional Leadership Team, Group Māori and the Best Evidence Synthesis team within the Ministry of Education, as well as those working on the He Kākano project who provided ongoing guidance and overall vision for Rangīatea—the case study and exemplar. The timely communications and willingness to participate in meaningful dialogue with the research team helped to draw out the most cogent learnings and enhance the final production of this case study. In particular, we acknowledge the support of Darren Gammie, Cheree Shortland-Nuku and Linda Stockham, along with Rawiri Gibson, Cathy Diggins and Ro Parsons.

The research team included Nan Wehipeihana, Kellie Spee and Kataraina Pipi. At their invitation, Judy Oakden led the team and had overall responsibility for the project.

## (FOOTNOTES)

- 1 “As Māori” means Māori enjoy success from the perspective of a Māori world view.
- 2 Te Kotahitanga: Improving the Educational Achievement of Māori Students in Mainstream Education. Te Kotahitanga is a research and professional development project for schools run by the University of Waikato.
- 3 A bluie is a blue form completed by the teacher when requiring a student to leave the classroom. The form is given to the student who must then leave the class and go to the school office where staff note the student is no longer in the class and organise for a letter to be sent home. The student then goes to the ruma whakaaro (contemplation/reflection room) with a reflection sheet to complete.
- 4 Whakawhanaungatanga is establishing relationships in a Māori context, pōwhiri is a welcome and manaakitanga is hospitality in a Māori context.
- 5 Teaching and learning hui across the whole school based on projects that students have indicated an interest in to develop further to support both learning and whakawhanaungatanga within different year levels.

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