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**Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ**  
**Manurewa, Auckland**

**Confirmed**

**Education Review Report:**  
**Arotake Paerewa**

*Kumāa te paetawhiti kia tata*  
*Whakamaua te paerewa kia tīna*  
*Tukuna te paehiranga kia topa!*



# Education Review Report: Arotake Paerewa Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ

The purpose of ERO's reviews is to give parents and the wider school community assurance about the quality of education that schools provide and their children receive. An ERO school report answers the question "How effectively is this school's curriculum promoting student learning - engagement, progress and achievement?" Under that overarching question ERO reports on the quality of education and learning outcomes for children and for specific groups of children including Māori students, Pacific students and students with special needs. ERO also reports on the quality of the school's systems for sustaining and continuing improvements.

## Findings

### 1 Context

**What are the important features of this school that have an impact on student learning?**

Blind and Low Vision Education Network NZ (BLENNZ) provides education and support for learners throughout New Zealand from birth to the age of 21. This provision ranges from early childhood education to a post-school transition programme and takes a variety of forms depending on the agreed needs of each learner at any time. Much of the programme is delivered through the Resource Teachers: Vision (RTVs) who work in conjunction with the learner's local school to provide ongoing support. Homai Campus School provides short-term support for learners and also caters for some very high needs students. An additional programme makes innovative use of available residential accommodation to provide immersion courses for learners who are ordinarily in local schools.

This report focuses on the network of provision for learners, including Homai Campus School and the residential accommodation.

Successive ERO reports on BLENNZ have acknowledged the strength of its leadership and governance. The commitment of school leaders to developing best practice in their area of special education has been well supported by the staff, who have responded positively to the challenges of reshaping the model of educational provision over the last ten years.

Since the 2008 ERO review, the board, with the support of the Ministry of Education, has had the opportunity to rebuild almost all the facilities on the Homai Campus. For the trustees, staff and students and families, the resulting opportunity to determine what matters most about their school has been a very important experience. It has strengthened their shared commitment to BLENNZ and enabled them to articulate a shared vision of high quality practice in blind and low vision education. As a result, the new buildings are a physical expression of commitment to innovative teaching practice as well as being an harmonious and effective working environment for a diverse range of learners.

## 2 Learning

**How well does this school use achievement information to make positive changes to learners' engagement, progress and achievement?**

BLENNZ students are highly engaged in learning. Students are placed in a variety of educational settings according to their need at the time. This can vary from being a student at a large secondary or primary school with support from an RTV, to placement in a specialist unit within Manurewa High School, home-room provision within James Cook High School, or placement for a period of time at Homai Campus School for intensive work on the expanded core curriculum. In all instances, the student's progress and satisfaction are carefully monitored to ensure the best fit.

BLENNZ often begins its relationship with families from a very early age. After careful assessment, differentiated provision also applies to blind and low vision learners in early childhood. The care that is taken to form relationships with families is evident in the strength of the partnerships between BLENNZ staff and families as the children progress through their education. Working with families in their homes and in early childhood education builds a strong foundation for competent and capable learners.

The progress of all BLENNZ learners is carefully monitored against their Individual Education Plans. Older students have Individual Transition Plans. The goals that are determined between the teachers, therapists, the families and, increasingly, the students, focus on learning and on ensuring that individuals develop the competencies needed to be able to function independently as learners.

There is an ongoing challenge in measuring the achievement of learners supported by BLENNZ. School-wide work on quantifying student achievement using indicators of achievement has been useful. Baseline data in literacy is now available and it will be significantly easier to determine how well groups of learners progress.

Most students at Homai Campus School achieve below the applicable National Standards in reading. Appropriate reporting is in place to parents, to the board of trustees and to the Ministry of Education. Parents are well informed about their child's progress as a learner. Very good use is made of photographic evidence to demonstrate exactly what the child's achievement is. While this practice is valuable for all learners, it is of particular importance where children are working below Level 1 of *The New Zealand Curriculum* and are likely to continue to do so.

## 3 Curriculum

**How effectively does this school's curriculum promote and support student learning?**

The clear focus of BLENNZ staff on the best ways to meet the needs of individual learners remains highly evident.

Students working in mainstream schools with support from RTVs have good opportunities to access the curriculum at age-appropriate levels and to succeed as learners across the curriculum. They are well supported by being able to attend immersion courses on the Homai Campus. These courses bring together groups of students of similar learning needs for residential experiences that extend their academic, personal and cultural learning.

Teachers have worked extensively to develop a BLENNZ curriculum that integrates *The New Zealand Curriculum* with the *Expanded Core Curriculum*, the specific skill base for blind and low vision learners. Integrating the teaching of these skills under the overarching key competencies of *The New*

*Zealand Curriculum* provides a clearer perspective of the learners' progress, and keeps the focus on the individual as a capable, competent learner.

The use of ICT to support learning is particularly striking. Many students use the special functions of tablet computers that are the same as those used by their peer groups to access print and to see objects in the classroom. As a result, they are able to participate significantly more fully in class and social activities. Being able to keep pace with their peer group and explore individual interests through such devices has been enormously liberating for many of these learners.

Affirming the cultural identity of Pacific students more overtly is a challenge for school leaders. While elements of Pacific cultural identity are part of the Homai campus, priority is rightly given to Māori. In considering future immersion courses it may be useful for teachers to plan courses that focus specifically on building cultural identity.

BLENNZ students at senior secondary level receive very good support to make decisions about their futures. Immersion courses focused on career and future planning are timed early enough for students and their families to make informed choices about pathways into study or employment. The subsequent success of BLENNZ students at universities and in the workforce is rightly a source of pride for the staff.

#### **How effectively does the school promote educational success for Māori, as Māori?**

The BLENNZ board and staff are committed to promoting success for Maori as Māori. Almost a quarter of students receiving support nationally from BLENNZ are Māori.

The use of Maōri protocols for formal occasions, as well as in the documentation of policies and procedures, has been appropriately informed by ongoing consultation with Ngati Kāpo o Aotearoa, Tamaki Ngati Kāpo and te Whānau o Homai.

Specially carved door pieces differentiate classrooms at the Homai Campus School and tell the stories of the place. A number of students use te reo Māori confidently and appropriately, and are well supported by school kaumatua.

The challenge now for all staff is to make tikanga Māori and te reo Māori more evident in the daily life of the school. An important step towards achieving this has been taken through the inclusion of culturally responsive competencies for teachers of Maōri children in teacher appraisal.

## **4 Sustainable Performance**

#### **How well placed is the school to sustain and improve its performance?**

BLENNZ is very well placed to sustain and improve its performance. The strong foundations in governance and leadership have proved to be sustainable and effective over time.

The leadership team is collaborative and cohesive. The shared commitment of school leaders to building capacity has resulted in a strong sense of professional identity as the deliverers of a consistently high quality national programme. Leadership structures promote accountability and acknowledge individual strengths. The leadership team is aware that to identify and grow emergent leadership regionally and nationally will further promote sustainable leadership within BLENNZ.

Teachers have worked together effectively to build a strong professional culture that operates throughout the network of provision. Transparent practice and high levels of professional respect, pride and trust are underpinned by robust appraisal. Teachers share an ongoing commitment to researching and implementing the best practice possible for the diverse needs of their learners.

Strong and effective self review is evident. There are clear links from the charter to the strategic plan to the annual plan to personal performance goals. Good reporting cycles and purposeful meetings serve to review and monitor progress towards goals. An action research model is used effectively to explore and develop innovative practice. Reporting to the board and to parents is clear and comprehensive.

Changes in funding formulas and responsibilities for aspects of blindness education have been well managed. Greater certainty about funding will support the board in its desire to build a permanent specialist workforce and will enable more sustainable provision in regional areas.

The BLENNZ Board of Trustees represents parents and the wider blind and low vision community. A legislative change in governance structure has made it possible to incorporate the blind and low vision community, including Ngati Kāpo, representing the Māori blind and low vision community. Trustees travel from around the country to attend meetings and key events. Trustees are aware of the challenges inherent in maintaining the current high levels of commitment and understanding of the nature of the organisation, while remaining open to growth and change.

The BLENNZ board seeks to maintain effective relationships with sector groups to ensure that all interested parties can contribute to the ongoing growth of blind and low vision education in New Zealand. Sector forums have been held and will continue to inform the growth of the organisation.

### **Provision for students in the school hostel**

The school hostel, Nikau Hostel, is owned and operated by the BLENNZ Board of Trustees. The hostel consists of residential accommodation for up to eleven students, who are attending local schools. A group of eleven older students is accommodated in Kickstart House as part of a post-school transition programme.

Further hostel accommodation is available for a variety of purposes. This includes students in immersion programmes who typically stay for a week while they undertake intensive courses, and parents as part of the assessment programme. Access to hostel facilities also supports staff professional development and training.

The hostel has been rebuilt as part of the rebuild of the wider Homai Campus and is designed to be used flexibly.

Attractive new facilities are purpose built to provide for diverse users of the accommodation, including young children with their families. An attractive cafe area, and generous provision of social and quiet spaces are features of a well thought out design that provides a sense of security and privacy where needed and promotes the independence of young people.

Many of the hostel staff have been employed for significant periods of time. Their commitment to the wellbeing of the students is evident and relationships between adults and young people are trusting and respectful. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for themselves and for others and to demonstrate leadership.

Students who are selected for the Kickstart programme very much enjoy the opportunity to live independently in a refurbished communal house. Their daily programme is negotiated with staff and is focused on meeting their individual needs as they move into adult life. The programme is purposeful, challenging and supportive. It clearly provides worthwhile opportunities for personal growth.

Very good systems continue to be evident to support the management of the hostel and to promote students' welfare and safety. Good reporting systems and thoughtful self review are evident. They are consistent with the high standards attained in this regard throughout BLENNZ.

### **Board assurance on legal requirements**

Before the review, the board of trustees and principal of the school completed the *ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists*. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- board administration
- curriculum
- management of health, safety and welfare
- personnel management
- financial management
- asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on student achievement:

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)
- physical safety of students
- teacher registration
- processes for appointing staff
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions
- attendance.

### **When is ERO likely to review the school again?**

ERO is likely to carry out the next review in four-to-five years.



Makere Smith  
National Manager Review Services  
Northern Region (Acting)

27 November 2012

## About the School

Location	Manurewa, Auckland	
Ministry of Education profile number	4156	
School type	Special school for students with visual impairment.	
School roll	40 at Homai Campus School 1436 in BLENNZ network of provision	
Gender composition	Boys 26 Girls 14	
Ethnic composition	NZ European/Pākehā	14
	Maori	13
	Samoan	6
	Indian	2
	Tongan	2
	other	3
Special Features	School Hostel	
Review team on site	September 2012	
Date of this report	27 November 2012	
Most recent ERO report(s)	Education Review	November 2008
	Education Review	November 2005
	Accountability Review	August 2001