

He ākonga ārahi mō āpōpō Innovative ākonga leadership

Case studies
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Grow
Waitaha



Acknowledgements

Authors: Jordan Mayes (he/him) and Gabrielle Wall (she/her)

This document discusses how schools and kura can innovate ākongā leadership with three case studies that highlight the potential of leadership programmes to empower groups of ākongā. In particular, these cases highlight the potential of leadership programmes to empower ākongā who may not otherwise feel such opportunities are available to them, ensuring all ākongā have a voice in school matters.

This is not intended as a roadmap or step-by-step guide, but more of a launchpad to consider some of the challenges schools and kura face in changing long-established models of ākongā leadership and the potential to create innovative and inclusive models of leadership. Schools may use this to begin their own discussions around changing ākongā

leadership to develop the capabilities in all ākongā and innovate school decision-making processes.

Grow Waitaha is a multi-year project designed to support schools in post-earthquake greater Christchurch through citywide educational transformation. This resource was written in 2024 by Jordan Mayes and Gabrielle Wall for the use of educators across Aotearoa.

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We welcome feedback and your ideas around innovative ākongā leadership. For feedback and suggestions please email:

growwaitaha@gmail.com

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Introduction

When we think about student leaders, several examples come to mind.

Often, our default understandings of student leaders include traditional models such as head boys and girls, house captains, Student Councils, student representatives at different events, and student volunteers.

However, as our educational communities and curriculum continue to grow and innovate, schools and kura are becoming increasingly aware that **traditional models of student leadership may be restricting innovation and the development of essential leadership capabilities** in students who would benefit from such development opportunities.

Schools and kura are also making considerable headway in diversity and inclusion, adapting their systems and strategies to authentically include diverse students and provide safe learning spaces.

Grow Waitaha supports future-focused education, developing global citizenship, and broad definitions of success.

This project explores student leadership in two schools in Waitaha, discussing the scope and impact of new student leadership ventures from local schools. This includes alternative ways of developing student leadership and for those who may feel that such opportunities don't apply to them or who do not naturally gravitate toward leadership roles.

Students from minority groups, for example, often feel that they do not 'fit the mold' of head girl/boy positions, may not feel safe taking public roles as leaders, or may not have experienced the same encouragement towards leadership growing up.



This project explores student leadership in two schools in Waitaha, discussing the scope and impact of new student leadership ventures from local schools.

Developing leaders vs. finding leaders

There is an important distinction between the concept of ‘natural leadership’ (or perceived leadership) and leadership capability.

This distinction is pivotal because it influences how schools identify, train, and support students to be leaders. It first requires schools and kura to understand that **all students may benefit from cultivating leadership capabilities**, not just those who are easily recognisable as leaders or who have been pushed into such roles throughout their lives.

‘Natural’ leadership is what we recognise in students who possess (or are perceived as having) inherent leadership qualities such as charisma, decisiveness, and confidence. They are visible leaders who are frequently placed in positions where these traits can flourish. They are often identified from a young age and may be given leadership roles throughout their education journeys. These are advantageous traits that place students in positions to build leadership expertise and make meaningful changes within schools. A narrow focus on these leaders, however, can inadvertently exclude students who do not overtly display such qualities but who have other attributes that may help them become effective leaders.

Leadership capability involves skills and attributes that can be supported and developed through education, experience, coaching, and deliberate practice. This perspective on leadership is inclusive as it offers all students from all backgrounds opportunities to learn and grow into leadership roles. This is particularly important for considering the experience of minority students, those from diverse backgrounds, those who have experienced trauma, or those who have otherwise felt or been told that they could not be leaders. This is a particular focus of this project and these case studies.



Leadership Capability involves skills and attributes that can be supported and developed through education, experience, coaching, and deliberate practice.

The case for developing leadership capability

Schools and kura play a crucial role in shaping the leaders of tomorrow.

Focusing on building leadership capabilities in students allows schools and kura to ensure that leadership is accessible to a broad range of students, preparing them for further learning and work in the contemporary world.

Providing comprehensive leadership opportunities is essential for fostering essential skills and qualities that prepare students for various roles within and beyond school.



Building a foundation for lifelong leadership skills

Schools and kura can help students acquire a range of skills that are important in various leadership positions. This includes decision-making, problem-solving, effective communication, public speaking, conflict resolution, collaboration and project management. Students may gain essential skills for uniting others, communicating strategic and inspirational visions to gain hearts and minds, and implementing change.

Leadership capabilities can be developed throughout students' school journeys, with more advanced opportunities becoming available as they grow older. When they are young, students can participate as classroom leaders and by taking charge of group activities. As they grow older, their leadership roles may become more profound and intuitive.

All students benefit from building upon leadership roles and can be encouraged to participate. This allows them to gain basic leadership skills that can be developed with more formal roles down the line.



Enhancing educational outcomes

Students who participate in leadership activities are often more engaged with their school and community. Leadership experience helps connect them to their academic and extracurricular pursuits, their peers and teaching staff, and can have positive outcomes for learning and attendance. Through developing leadership capabilities, students develop their skills in written and verbal communication, problem-solving, and group work, adding richness to their learning.

Students in leadership roles may also be motivated to set themselves higher standards. They may feel intrinsically motivated to achieve better results, participate in more activities, and raise the status of their school and peers. Strengthening student leadership may assist in enhancing their educational experience and what they get from school.

The case for developing leadership capability



Promoting diversity and inclusion

Many schools are making meaningful changes to be more inclusive of diverse communities. Leadership is an essential area for developing inclusion. This includes proactively creating opportunities for diverse students to engage in leadership opportunities they might not apply for otherwise. Inclusive education allows all voices to be heard and valued, reflecting a more equitable school culture.

Having diverse student leaders builds cultural competency. Leaders who understand and appreciate diversity can foster a more inclusive and supportive school environment. This helps prepare learners for living and working in the contemporary world. Diversity and inclusion also allow greater representation of student voices in matters such as governance and decision-making.



Preparing students for the future

Developing leadership capability trains students for unforeseen situations and challenges in today's rapidly changing world. Developing students' abilities as effective leaders involves helping them pivot roles and responsibilities, delegate, and act as leaders in various contexts.

Experience as leaders grows resilience. Students learn to handle setbacks rationally and professionally and adapt to changing needs.

Providing these opportunities will also help students access scholarships, gain entry into advanced learning programmes, and access career paths that interest them. Students who have participated in leadership programmes and opportunities at school often find it easier to transition into the workforce and assume professional roles.



Purposeful leadership development

Many young people emerge as leaders naturally throughout their school journey.

In the dynamic landscape of education, however, schools should consider proactively developing leadership capabilities in all students.

This approach does more than just foster personal growth; it significantly enhances the collective capacity of the student body to lead with innovation, insight, and effectiveness.

Schools should develop their leadership profiles for the following reasons:

- + **To provide opportunities** for all ākonga to apply for various leadership roles.
- + **To develop leadership** in all students through established leadership roles and various leadership activities.
- + **To signal to all students** and the wider community that students from diverse backgrounds have opportunities proactively afforded to them.
- + **To develop important learning** and job-related skills that will help them as they transition to new schools, higher education, and work.
- + **To enhance personal development**, set and achieve personal goals, and enhance self-esteem, confidence, and resilience.
- + **To promote and improve academic** engagement.
- + **To foster a positive school culture** and increase student collaboration.
- + **To encourage civic responsibility** and use this to make meaningful change in the school and community.
- + **To develop future professionals** and tomorrow's leaders.
- + **To facilitate peer learning** and collective problem-solving.
- + **To improve school governance** and decision-making, and engage students in matters of governance.
- + **To promote and amplify** student voice.
- + **To encourage innovation** and student co-creation.
- + **To further cultivate community connections** and make improvements to the local community and environment.

The case studies were conducted to provide context to the development of leadership and the innovation that is allowing more students to experience leadership. We have chosen to present fewer case studies in greater detail to explore the journey undertaken to innovate student leadership. Senior leadership and kaiako may find these helpful as they begin discussions at school to develop student leadership.

CASE STUDY



Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School *Diversity Captains*

Photo: Ākonga from Rangiora High School



Overview

We spoke with **Amanda Peter**, kaiako and Rainbow Coordinator at Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School.

Amanda recognised that not all students at Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School felt they were afforded opportunities to experience leadership, and sought to work alongside students and senior leadership to implement changes that would allow more students to experience leadership.

Working closely with Māori, Pacific, and rainbow students, Amanda has helped create diversity captains to provide more opportunities and experiences for students who often feel they are flying under the radar.



The challenge

Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School is a large school with more than 1500 secondary students.

Amanda pointed out that traditional roles often exclude students who experience discrimination. Traditional leadership roles have attracted students who fit a particular mold, they are typically more boisterous, have charisma and are popular with their peers, and participate in sports and extra-curricular activities etc. Amanda sought to work with others to broaden the scope of leadership and afford opportunities to the vulnerable students she works with.

There was a need for better alignment between Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School's dedication to diversity and inclusion, and the leadership structures in place. In the past, this has limited the personal development of diverse students and limited their voice in matters pertinent to the school and its operations. Through embracing diversity and inclusion, leadership could be changed and innovated to give all ākonga a voice, regardless of their background. This would gradually shift the focus of leadership to create more sustainable change for all ākonga and raise their achievement and experience of school.

Amanda is the coordinator for QSA (Queer Student Alliance) at Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School and works with LGBTQIA+ ākonga and the challenges they face. These students often do not feel safe and the current political climate has been particularly challenging for gender-diverse ākonga. At Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School, this was evident in discriminatory bullying in spaces such as the bus and bathrooms.

In giving rainbow ākonga a greater voice, there has also been pushback from parents in the form of bullying and discrimination.

With growing concern over discriminatory actions and deeply held beliefs, many students do not feel that they can speak up in front of others, be advocates for the school, or have the same opportunities as cis-gender and heterosexual peers. This highlights the challenge of how to provide leadership development and opportunities to those who have not always felt safe accessing them.



The journey

Amanda was given the responsibility and space to support students with the discrimination they often face.

This has gained a lot of momentum in the pastoral care systems of the school and has facilitated increased visibility and understanding. Change has been gradual and meaningful with students advocating for the things that make their school feel safer and more inclusive. Students have been supported to advocate for improved bathrooms and changing facilities that are more inclusive of gender-diverse students.

With time and unwavering advocacy, systems-level changes occurred such as the routine use of pronouns, allowing students to change their names on the school roll, and improved guidance and pastoral care. With assistance from the students, the school has grown in its understanding and the normalisation of diverse experiences and identities. With these steps, it became clear there was a mandated need for diverse students to be represented in student leadership so they could lead positive change in the school.

This led to the creation of **diversity captains**. This was intended to empower ākongā, share decision-making power with diverse students, and streamline processes to improve outcomes for these students.

“I went around knocking on doors, wearing people out. Then, all of a sudden, we realised we could have a diversity captain.”

This process required some iterations to determine how it could best be used. Firstly, would there be one or multiple captains? Would they cover all areas of diversity and inclusion or focus on one area? There was a challenge to cover all the right bases without bestowing too much responsibility on one student in the role, particularly while they are trying to advocate for themselves and others. It was decided that there needed to be a Māori Captain, Pasifika Captain, Rainbow Captain, and International Captain, each providing necessary support to their respective communities.

“These people need access to opportunities, pathways, even scholarships that they may not necessarily have been able to access before... those traditional pathways are often closed to those students.”

The diversity captains are an opportunity for students to learn about and hone their skills in leadership. As the Rainbow Coordinator at Te Kura tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School, Amanda noted that rainbow students are often “trying to fit into the background” as leadership has traditionally been privilege of popular and boisterous students.

“That comes with a particular set of problems in terms of visibility because of harassment etc.”

It can be difficult for rainbow students to build understanding and advocate for themselves without such opportunities. The rainbow captain role allowed them to disrupt the traditional systems that were not allowing them the same opportunities to create meaningful change and make their communities safer.





The journey



Diversity captains have been running for approximately three years now. Their feedback is that they want to learn about leadership **earlier**.

Those who are shy, trying to fit into the background and make it through school safely, feel that they would have benefited from learning such skills early in school so they could have played a role in shaping the school environment to make it more inclusive.

At first, it was somewhat difficult to get the diversity captains to participate in leadership activities and take a leadership role. This largely came down to their demeanour and their history of experiencing discriminatory bullying. This was met with some criticism from others.

The crux of the criticism was: What does it mean to be a leader?

There were some important lessons:

1. Leadership should be offered to all students in various forms, including those who do not fit a traditional 'mold' of leadership.
2. Students need time to grow and develop skills and we cannot assume they will be proficient or confident early in their journey.
3. Leaders work to their strengths, which may mean they work more in the background rather than in public facing activities.
4. Diversity and representation are important in structures of leadership to ensure that diverse voices are represented in decision-making processes.
5. Less vocal leaders may allow for more richness in discussion; multiple voices may be heard and validated.

Without experience as school leaders, diverse learners may not take to public speaking roles or become comfortable working with others quickly. Amanda pointed out the need to start leadership development early and build essential skills such as negotiation, public speaking and project planning etc.

“Especially for neurodiversity and a different range of people, so they can practice those early steps of leadership as they come into their own. I’m trying to figure out how to create those opportunities early.”

Along the way, there have been hiccups and learning moments. One example was a survey sent out by student leaders to other students about gender-neutral bathrooms. While intended for students, the survey gained traction among parents who complained to the school. Some students wrote transphobic and discriminatory comments. The survey was quickly intercepted and shut down but highlighted the challenges and barriers that diversity captains face in advocating for themselves and others. It highlighted to the school that many ākongā face ongoing discrimination and bullying and that this inhibits them from experiencing school to its fullest.



The journey

The Diversity Captain roles at Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School are still new and there is a lot of work to be done with students to develop these roles and make them a staple part of the school and its culture. Amanda acknowledges there is a long way to go and not many resources and advice. Time will tell what Diversity Captains can become, but there are implications for what this means for the wider education sector and the future roles of diverse students at Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School.

“There’s still a long long way to go. I would like them to get the same status as other student leadership roles. The same amount of breathing space. The same amount of resourcing... What I need to do is access more learning around how to develop leaders.”

“

There seems to be a culture of surveillance. That imported culture. I showed the Principal and Deputy Principal... this is what they’re facing every single day.”





The wider education sector



Te Kura Tuarua o Rangiora / Rangiora High School's leadership initiative reflects a broader shift in educational leadership towards more inclusive and equitable practices, and recognising the barriers that many students face throughout their schooling life.

Representation is an important tool for impactful change.



Broadened leadership opportunities

Diversity Captains ensure that students from various backgrounds, particularly those who often feel marginalised or underrepresented, have a voice in school matters and governance. This can encourage more students to engage with and contribute to their school community, knowing that their perspectives are valued and impactful.



Improved school culture

When leadership reflects the diverse makeup of the student body, it promotes a more inclusive school culture. Understanding and acceptance can be built and fostered, and this can enhance the overall experience of school and reduce incidents of discrimination and exclusion.

Several lessons can be learned from this case study for the wider education sector:

1. Recognising diverse leadership styles

Schools should acknowledge that effective leaders come in many forms and that leadership potential can be found in students who may not fit the traditional mold. Less vocal students, or those from diverse backgrounds, can offer unique insights and approaches to leadership that enrich decision-making processes.

2. Structured support systems

Implementing roles such as Diversity Captains requires support and ongoing development for ākonga and teachers. Leadership skills, conflict

resolution, and effective communication are essential. There needs to be staff and senior leader support for students to make the role their own.

3. Regular feedback and adaptation

New leadership roles should not be considered the final step to diverse and innovative leadership. **Ongoing evaluation and refinement is essential.** This helps to ensure that the initiative remains effective and responsive to the school's needs, and ongoing feedback helps to adapt the role. Schools should focus on how new leadership roles can serve goals of inclusivity and representation.

4. Expanding the definition of leadership

Defining leadership in a fixed, immutable way discourages innovation and opportunity. A diverse perspective is required, and students are well-placed to help co-create this concept. Leadership education that includes diverse perspectives prepares students for the complexities of the modern world and provides them with skills they might otherwise find difficult to develop.



Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School *Multilevel Leadership*



Photo: Ākonga from Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School

Overview

The challenge

This section is titled **Multilevel Leadership** as Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School has been innovating leadership across its student body from new entrants through to school leavers. We spoke with **Kylie Horgan**, Deputy Principal and Head of Level for Year 13, and **Kathy Paterson**, former Tumuaki | Principal, as well as a sample of student leaders to hear their perspectives on changing leadership for the future school.

By co-creating leadership with students, Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School has worked toward developing leadership in innovative ways that encourage student participation in school governance and connect them to the tangible impacts they can have. Student voice is emphasised and meaningfully connected to school decision-making.

Traditionally, student leadership roles at Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School were reserved for senior students and typically culminated in positions such as head boy and head girl.

This structure often meant that younger students had few opportunities to engage in leadership activities or influence school systems until their senior years. Eventually, a Junior Council was added but this was a long way to go in terms of student voice.

The hierarchy was also restricted to a head boy and girl and their deputies, which meant such opportunities were unavailable to gender-diverse students.

The school council balanced a range of responsibilities, and with limited time students often found themselves unable to meet all the demands.

The process of appointing leaders was also very fast. Kylie described it as a “speed-dating” situation involving an application, an interview, and then they were appointed roles. There was a time when they felt that this model was not representative of the student body and did not encourage those with diverse experiences to apply if they did not fit some pre-established mold.

Kathy and Kylie realised that evolving leadership required them to break the mold and give all students a voice. This would not only benefit the students but the school as a whole, as they would better meet the needs of diverse learners and provide opportunities for student voice across all year levels.





The journey



The journey of transforming leadership began around 2017.

They had a head boy and a head girl, each had a deputy of those genders, 10 mini councils, and a Junior Council for Year 9 and 10 students. Before this, the head students did not have deputies. Now, the structure is very different:

- + 4 head students (of any gender identity)
- + 22 students who work on projects under a Te Whare Tapa Whā model
- + Student executive made up of 2-3 representatives from each year level
- + Junior impact team
- + House leaders

Head student selection

Like many schools, Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School has transgender/gender-diverse students who are out. The concept of a head boy or girl did not afford opportunities to gender-diverse students, and changing this to four head students made the roles more inclusive so that the best students for the job could be selected, regardless of gender. Kathy describes the new system as more flexible and working better for ākongā.

They emphasised that the leaders make up a team. This is particularly important for the selection process, to ensure that they appoint student leaders who have shown that they can work together for the betterment of the school.

“We are appointing a team. It’s not a person, it’s a team. When we are doing that [selection] process, from the get-go, students know they’re coming into a team working with others.”

This was one of the important lessons that Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School learned in innovating leadership development. In the past, students were appointed by making an application to the Principal. The Principal would then get feedback from teachers.

The **head students** would be appointed based on those recommendations and the application. It was important to make the process more robust to ensure that there was an effective team that could work collaboratively.

Since then, the appointment of head students has become a three-month process. Firstly, students are encouraged to make an application. They then have an informal conversation and have a brief opportunity to make their case for leadership. The Principal then shortlists 12 applicants.

The 12 applicants then enter a selection process to develop their collaborative skills and see how they work as a team. They do posters and a speech to the school on a topic given to them. The process is democratic with both students and staff getting to vote on the applicants. The year 12 votes are separated as these students know the candidates as part of their cohort and may vote according to social influences.

Shortlisted applicants spend an afternoon doing team-building exercises designed to highlight their strengths and personalities. The team-building exercises assess things like giving instructions,



The journey



listening, taking charge, and whether they help others or are out for themselves, among other competencies. They are given various scenarios in fun improvised activities, and while there are no prescribed solutions, their ability to solve problems and work together is assessed.

“We’re looking for the qualities that will make up the team and how they’re going to complement each other... You can’t expect everyone to be good at everything.”

In this way, different skill sets and personalities make up the team in a complementary way, rather than having a team of people who work alone, are too competitive, or cannot work with one another’s strengths and weaknesses.

Stewardship is also an important part of the process. For example, supporting local groups, people with disabilities etc. The purpose is to have students engage with the wider community and environment in stewardship activities, often getting them out of their comfort zone (socially) and giving them experience in real-world leadership activities.

In the final stage, they complete a 20-minute interview. As part of this, they need to put forward someone else who they think would be a good head

student. This encourages them to think about the capabilities of others and the potential of their team. In another group exercise, they are asked why the person next to them would make a good leader, again, making them focus on the team’s capabilities rather than focusing on themselves.

“[They] come into the space thinking about why they would be a good head student, to leaving thinking about other people. What comes out every year is students say throughout the process that they come out understanding that other people want it just as much as they do and are just as capable.”

The selection process is thorough, and in the end, the best people are selected for the job, and the others are happy for them. The selection process for student leaders at Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School is interesting as it not only appoints effective students to work as a team but is a leadership development tool in and of itself. Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School has needed to consider what makes a student leadership team successful, and how the process of applying to be a leader can help students develop their leadership knowledge and capabilities along the way.

“

You might not get head student, but you go through a lot of personal growth through the process itself. When we’re putting leadership things in place for students, it’s just as much about the process and the growth you get along the way.”

Students get exposed to the different aspects of leadership and the attributes of good leaders from a selection perspective. Along the way, they develop their skills and broaden their understanding, making head student selection a win-win scenario.



The journey

Student Council oversight

Head students have oversight over the Student Council which has also undergone a lot of change in recent years. Initially, the Student Council comprised many small councils with two people in each with a set portfolio (e.g. Sports Council, Culture Council, Academic Council etc.). The new council has been co-designed with students and shifted to a Te Whare Tapa Whā model. The portfolios are now divided among the four areas of wellbeing: Taha Hinengaro, Taha Tinana, Taha Whānau, and Taha Wairua.

Students look at the main outcomes that the council want to achieve, and they commence their time at the council with a solutions-focused approach.

“Rather than being driven by the people, it’s driven by the outcomes.”

Each year, the council goes through a feedback process to reflect on what worked well and what did not. This all gets summarised into a “book of wisdom” to be passed to subsequent councils who can repeat things that achieved change and make adjustments as necessary.

Student Executive

The Student Executive started approximately five years ago. Traditionally, there was a separate junior council and school council. The purpose of the Student Executive is to ensure that there is voice and representation across all year levels and diverse backgrounds. They are a point of contact for all students and are responsible for enacting meaningful changes that affect all students. Their work is project-based through writing and presenting proposals.

The Student Executive is made up of 3-4 students from each year level (and two from year 13). Student Council and Student Executive are separate teams, and the goal is to ensure that there are more leadership opportunities for all students and ample representation of voices from across all students. Head Students attend executive meetings but do not have voting rights.

Representation and inclusion are important features of leadership. The Student Executive highlights the power of representation in leadership for the betterment of the entire school body. For example, there is a Māori representative from the Māori Advocacy Group, there has been representation from the LGBTQIA+ group, and students of different cultures and nationalities are included. It is about

the perspective that they bring and the people they represent.

The Executive is a good forum for including students in governance matters. They collaboratively write proposals to the board on matters of importance to students.

“Last year they presented to me ideas about sun shade and places to sit. They did a presentation to the board property committee, and now we’ve put in the budget this year some actions to put their ideas into place.”

In term two, all students are given the opportunity to make proposals to the board and the Student Executive runs that process. This allows students to attempt to change the things they do not like in the school and make their complaints constructive.

“Have you got a problem? Something you want in the school? On the website it has how to put a proposal together and how to submit it. If their peers choose to support the proposal, it goes to the next stage presenting to the Principal and the board. Any student has the opportunity to change things.”



The journey



“A student was complaining about nose piercings. Rather than complain about it, put a proposal together! The powerful thing is we’re teaching students that change can be good, but it needs to be constructive. It’s not just petitions and complaining, nobody has a problem listening to what you want to say, but there needed to be a process for them to actually engage in.”

“What it does give them is the opportunity to sit in front of [the Principal], the board, and with the Student Executive there to support them.”

They are encouraged to follow the **Theory of Change**. This theory sets out how and why a change is expected to come about and is used as a roadmap to plan what needs to be done to achieve the intended result and explain the underlying rationale. This is illustrated on a single page and encourages students to think critically about their proposal, including outlining the projected costs and resources.

The Junior Impact Team and House Captains

Another recent initiative was the creation of the **Junior Impact Team** which replaced the Junior Council. There are approximately 30 students in the team, led by four year 11 students. They run two awareness campaigns and two activities each year. For example, they ran a water campaign, collected data, and used this to inform the effectiveness of whether it encouraged students to drink more water. They choose an area of impact in the Te Whare Tapa Whā model and show how it will make a difference.

This allows junior students to have an impact in the school and see their work make a difference according to projected outcomes. Their participation in campaigns also gives them experience in stewardship activities, advocating for positive change and improved wellbeing across the school.

The role of house captain has also evolved. This is because, in the past, staff would often pick up the slack in activities that promote house spirit and student camaraderie. This is now the responsibility of house captains who keep the house system alive and use their leadership role to build connectivity amongst the student body.

They run six activities across six school houses. Teachers have some oversight but leave the majority of the organisation to students. This has made marked improvements in the house system and social aspects of the school.



Discussion with student leaders of Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School

As part of this case study, we had a kōrero with a sample of student leaders at Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School.

The sample included a Head Student, a representative from the Student Executive, and members of the Junior Impact Team. The discussion focused on their experience as leaders, their inspiration to apply to be leaders, and the impact their role is having on the school and their own personal development.

The students discussed that their roles are important for giving mana to student voice and enacting the changes that they feel are important and can have a positive impact on the school community.

It is also an opportunity for them to champion their school and their diverse communities.

“It is a really good way for year 9s and 10s to join a bigger group with people their age, to be involved in the school and get involved in leadership.”

“We are trying to have a measurable and positive impact in the community. We give the year 9s and 10s a chance to be involved in leadership alongside people at a higher year level.”

“We’re trying to give the junior part of the school a chance to participate without it being so intimidating. They get to be involved in the running of the school.”

“From my perspective, when I came into school there was not a massive amount of representation. Looking at the council now, we have a mix of people from every background. How can we take that, and push projects out to help represent everyone in the school.”



Discussion with student leaders of Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School

The discussion on representation also discussed access and how leadership opportunities are accessible to different groups of students and that all students have an opportunity to feed into decision-making processes. They felt that traditional systems of student leadership did not allow for this and could leave students feeling like they do not have a say in matters pertinent to the school.

The next step could be to have more student feedback and involvement in the leadership selection processes. This is important because student leaders enter a team and work collaboratively so having some involvement in who is appointed can help students to refine and adapt the group to meet the changing needs of the school and student body over time.

We asked students about what impact the leadership roles were having. They shared that there is a lot of work involved and a lot of communication with students. The communication aspect has helped them to develop their confidence and skills in public speaking, gathering feedback and data, making proposals, and collaboratively making decisions.

Below are some quotes from students on what they've learned and how they've developed along the way:

“My time management skills are through the roof! A lot of communication skills with people. Like how can I communicate with someone I don't know? How to understand things from someone else's perspective.”

“Being in a big group, it helped with communication. Being able to talk in front of a group and meet new people.”

“It takes time. Behind the scenes, it takes a lot of work. Being a student representative on the school board, there are a lot of roles and it takes a lot of time. You need to work and have faith that the process will work out.”

“I get a lot of confidence from the people I represent. We work with the Student Council and that gives me confidence in talking to people, arguing points... we can help represent as many people as we can.”



The wider education sector



The case of Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School has several key learnings that can be applied across the education sector to achieve better leadership development across secondary learners. Not only have they increased opportunities across all year levels, but they have been developing robust and inclusive selection processes that feed into leadership development.

This has not only benefited the governance of the school but also the personal development of students who have multiple opportunities to be leaders.



Multilevel leadership

Students at Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School have multiple opportunities to exercise their leadership capabilities throughout their secondary school life. This includes the Junior Impact Team, the Student Executive, Head Students, and the Student Council. While in the past junior students felt they had little control over school decisions, they are now empowered with opportunities to contribute to school governance.

Students across all levels are encouraged to formalise their ideas into proposals, and the Student Executive (running across all school levels) oversees these proposals and allows opportunities for other students to present to the board. The goal is to create a sustainable system that allows for leadership to develop through students' time at Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School.



Diverse representation

Student leadership not only represents the different year levels, but also diverse communities within the school such as Māori, Pacific peoples, international, and rainbow. Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School is dedicated to finding the leader in all students of all backgrounds.

What's more important is what they can bring to the team, what they can learn, how they use their knowledge and strengths for the betterment of the school and their peers. In this way, Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School recognises that **anyone could be a leader, and it's about unlocking that potential.**



The wider education sector



Harnessing the selection process

What is particularly innovative about Te Kura Tuarua o Waihora / Lincoln High School is their use of the selection process to not only strengthen leadership teams, but to take students through a journey of self-development. There are several important features that other schools may consider in their own leadership development programmes:

- + Leadership opportunities are available to all students, including those who are juniors.
- + Students who are not in a leadership group can give feedback to student leaders and make proposals that can be presented to the school board.
- + Students develop skills around gathering feedback and data, planning projects to achieve desired outcomes, and going through appropriate governance channels to achieve meaningful change.

- + The Head Student selection process has students participate in leadership-development activities, and the focus is more on how they work as a team and how their personalities and skill sets complement one another, rather than how an individual performs.
- + By the end of the selection process, students think more about the collective capabilities of the team and what it means to be an effective leader.
- + The selection process not only appoints effective student leaders and effective leadership teams but is also an effective tool for personal and leadership development.

Schools across the sector may consider how they can innovate leadership selection and develop young leaders through activities and as part of teams. It is important to note that this process has evolved over multiple years and is still developing as senior leadership and students co-create sustainable leadership pathways.





Leadership Lab Puāwai

Leadership Through Diversity

Photo: Ākonga from Puāwai





Overview



Target audience

Puāwai is a project facilitated by Leadership Lab in Waitaha, Aotearoa New Zealand.

It is a purpose-driven programme designed to empower young leaders in Christchurch, specifically targeting rangatahi aged 15-18. Funding for Puāwai has been provided by the J.R.McKenzie Trust, Todd Foundation, The Wayne Francis Charitable Trust, Ministry of Youth Development, and the Gough Family Trust to make it free and accessible to rangatahi.

We spoke with **Libby Davenport**, an Impact Lead for Puāwai.

This initiative focuses on fostering inclusive and diverse young leaders by providing them with opportunities to develop and grow essential leadership skills, connect with peers, and engage in innovative projects that can lead to real impact within their communities. The programme is deeply rooted in kaupapa Māori, emphasising the development of strengths and self-knowledge among participants.

The kaupapa Māori approach allows all rangatahi to be recognised, heard and included.

They work collaboratively and the programme emphasises the strengths of all individuals. In the past, rangatahi have been organised in rōpū, working closely with tuākana who are older than them and who help lead them on their journey. Now, as the programme is more a journey of 'self', there are less explicit rōpū but the journey is still tailored toward marginalised identities. Puāwai includes rangatahi who identify with many marginalised groups, including Māori, Pasifika, Rainbow, Ethnic, Disability, and Care Experienced communities.

The selection of tuākana has been very deliberate. They provide mentorship and guidance throughout the programme – the young people are connected with tuākana with experiences similar to their own or who build strong relationships. It can be hard sometimes for young people to relate with their teachers at school and they may not always have a sense of community at school. Being connected with like-minded individuals and with a relatable tuakana helps them find common ground with people in positively impacting their communities.

Puāwai is for young people who are actively involved in their communities, schools, or social circles but are not necessarily formally recognised as leaders in these capacities. Specifically, the programme reaches rangatahi from diverse communities who may have been marginalised or faced discrimination, offering them a platform to enhance their leadership skills and be recognised for what they can do. They may be considered 'invisible' leaders who may not be put forward in schools for leadership roles and development.

“Puāwai is an experience or a journey for young people... It is a journey of self. They are learning about themselves and their community.”

Generally, rangatahi are aged 15-18 but this is adjusted for some candidates. It is an opportunity to learn about their strengths, their communities, their talents, and how to collaborate with others.

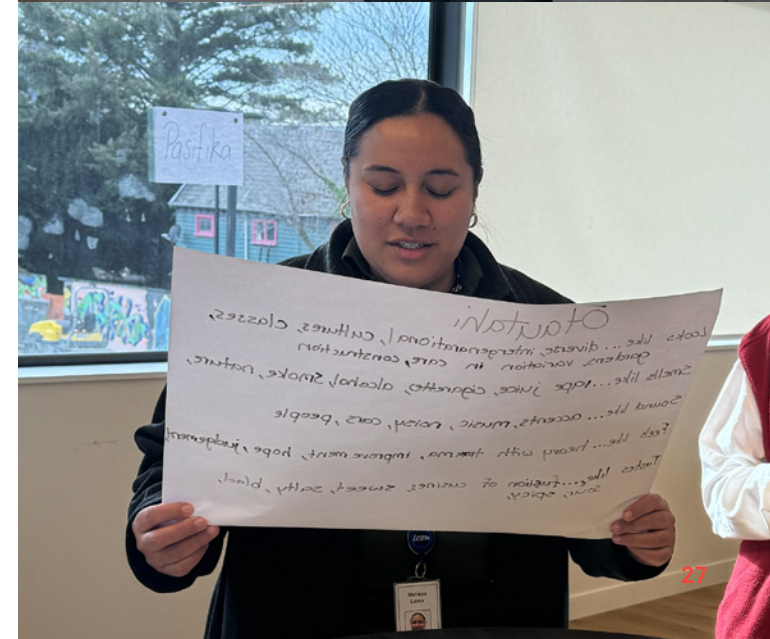
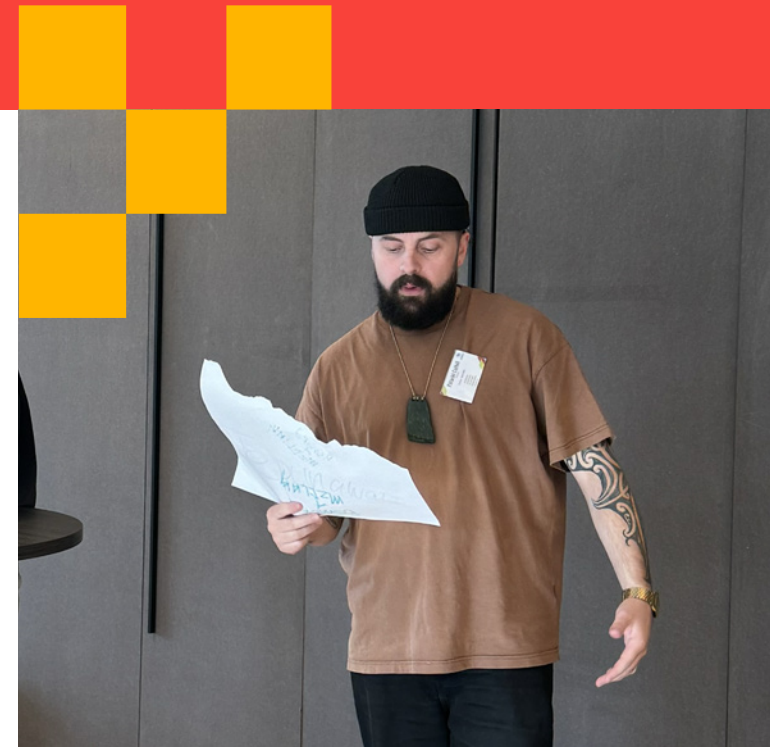


Integration of kaupapa Māori

The integration of kaupapa Māori in the Puāwai programme encourages a more holistic approach to leadership, encouraging students to apply principles of manaakitanga, totahitanga, tino rangatiratanga, inclusion and wairuatanga to their community endeavours.

This emphasises the collective effort of young leaders, their shared responsibilities, building connections and authentic relationships, mutual care and respect, and spiritual connections to land, heritage and ancestry. Whānau, hapū, and iwi have models of leadership that ākonga bring with them to school - how does the school value these behaviours and leadership attributes?

Young leaders connect their leadership efforts to the greater good and the wider context of their communities and explore the mana of their identities and communities. Puāwai enables rangatahi to lead in ways that respect and uplift their communities, fostering positive change that is culturally informed and sustainable.





The programme

Typically, Puāwai has been a journey that spans several hui throughout the year.

Feedback indicated, however, that that was hard for rangatahi to commit to given the amount of change they go through while at school. Consequently the 2024 programme has changed from one 9 month programme to two 4 month programmes with three short phases. This has led to much higher engagement (25–30 rangatahi per programme) and also allowed rangatahi to repeat the programme a second time in a tuakana role.

After the Wānanga workshops and Activator events, there is a wrap-up for the young people to discuss what they have learnt.

Phase 1: Strength-finder coaching

Participants receive coaching based on their top five strengths, helping them to build on their inherent qualities. Each young person does an online assessment that unlocks their top five strengths. They get a one-hour coaching session to help them understand their strengths more and how to apply them. This is essential for building and enhancing their capabilities as leaders and helping them understand the potential impact they can have as leaders from a practical perspective.

“We encourage them to identify a role within their Activator event where they have an opportunity to apply or develop those strengths further. That’s always a major highlight of Puāwai.”

The strength-finder training also helps them understand that leadership comes in different forms and is not necessarily an outspoken, public role. It provides context to leadership and allows them to apply their leadership strengths in ways that do not necessarily fit the mold of leadership they have been exposed to in the past. Through building their strengths and applying them to Activator events, they develop a greater understanding of what it means to be a leader and the different types of leaders that exist.

“It has been pivotal for some young people, through Puāwai they may learn that their strengths are through connecting others, organising or arranging an event to allow others to use their strengths, so it’s the biggest tool we use to guide them on their leadership journey.”

Feedback from rangatahi highlights how the strength-finder training has helped them identify strengths in themselves and others and understand how these are used in various settings, as highlighted in the quotes below from participants:

“Some of the things I wanted to change about myself are actually some of my top strengths. Now I can reframe this and see myself in a different light and spend energy in embracing this strength rather than trying to make myself fit into society’s ideal.”

“I think I am more aware of my strengths and how I can apply them to my everyday life. I think it has also taught me to be more attentive to people’s experiences.”





The programme



Phase 2: Two day wānanga

This two-day workshop provides a blend of educational sessions, networking opportunities, and leadership exercises. This acts as a deep dive into several activities that develop their leadership. For example, “Window To Our World” allows Rangatahi to organise and experience activities that showcase what they feel is most important to them about their community with other people.

“It has generally been a really positive experience for those young people involved. Sometimes it’s a challenge for them, especially with communication and confidence in public speaking, they may find it daunting. But they often reflect that it has been one of the most positive experiences for them.”

“They work with other young people like themselves, find out what is important to them, talk about their experiences, share that with others, and learn more about those other communities and get insight into the lives of other young people through the lens of their communities.”

With a focus on their identities and communities, the Wānanga Workshops allow rangatahi to explore their own culture and heritage, think deeply about the components of their identity and showcase to other people from other communities what is important to them. They also learn about others who come from different backgrounds and find similarities and differences that help them connect on a much deeper level.

Feedback from rangatahi highlights the value they get from exploring their identities and those of others:

“I made connections with people and found it interesting learning about other cultures and communities.”

“There’s more that connects us than separates us.”

Phase 3: Rangatahi-led activator events

Youth-led practical projects are a critical component of the programme and they enable participants to apply what they know and what they have learned by designing and facilitating community-oriented events. The Activator is co-designed with the rangatahi so they have input into the content and delivery of the event.

“We’ve found that there is a more positive experience if we build the bones of the event, then they have the autonomy to co-design the content.”

They decide how the event will be run, including whether it is a presentation, panel, discussion, etc. They help determine the themes, experiences, and kai. Events in the past have included sharing cultural experiences, sharing kai and recipes, and showcasing art in an exhibition.

“The Activators are powerful in the sense that they enable them to apply their strengths and learn about their strengths, how they relate to others, how other strengths can show up through those interactions.”



The impact

Puāwai has an ongoing evaluative component that assesses the impact of the programme on young people.

This includes gathering feedback from those rangatahi who have finished the programme.

Feedback indicated that Puāwai has helped them identify, value, and understand their culture and those of others. They have opportunities to share their culture while learning more about others. Identifying commonalities unites them to shared visions. It also helps them identify the strengths that lie in their identities and how they can harness that for positive change.

Young people also make meaningful connections with others. Often, they do not get the opportunity to experience this at school or experience it on a much smaller scale. Puāwai has a strong focus on whakawhanaungatanga which helps young people build connections with others. These connections often extend beyond Puāwai.

“I’ve learnt how to communicate better, which has helped me have healthier relationships.”

“A lot of young people talk about the increased connection with other young people. Sometimes, the rangatahi we have in Puāwai struggle to make those connections at school or struggle to feel a part of those communities within their school.”

The skills and experiences from Puāwai help strengthen young people’s CVs and help them with the confidence and language they need to excel in interviews. They are better able to articulate who they are, why they do what they do, and how to highlight their leadership capabilities. This is highlighted in the quotes below from rangatahi:

“I haven’t been very good at setting boundaries, and Puāwai has really helped me to learn to speak up for myself, and I’ve really appreciated that.”

One of the largest impacts is the experience of leadership for rangatahi who may not have that opportunity at school. Due to their culture, identity, or personality, they do not fit the prescribed model of leadership promoted at their school, or they feel that such opportunities would not be available to them.

Puāwai bridges this gap and helps them identify their strengths and develop their leadership capabilities. Strengths training is a particularly strong tool that helps them learn about their talents that can influence their journeys as leaders.



They reconnect with what is important to them. They value what they have learnt and what value their culture has brought them.



The wider education sector



Puāwai is a programme that runs outside of school, offering opportunities for rangatahi to access leadership opportunities that they may not otherwise be able to access.

Schools may use Puāwai as an example of what can be achieved by enabling student leadership that is inclusive and culturally responsive.



Identifying and developing strengths

One of the strongest tools for positive development in the Puāwai programme is using strengths training. This recognises that young people may not be strong in traditional areas of leadership such as public speaking or managing a team but may possess strengths in other areas that can greatly benefit a team and enact positive change.

Strengths coaching helps rangatahi identify what these strengths are and how they might be applied to practical experiences such as community events. This allows them to develop the things that make them effective leaders and identify where additional support and development might be required.



Recognising the mana of individuals and communities

Puāwai has a strong focus on culture and identity. Schools and kura may benefit from focusing more of their leadership efforts on harnessing the power that diverse backgrounds bring to the table. Rangatahi develop a strong sense of self and understand that their identity and background bring strength to diverse teams. They will be better placed to connect with others through understanding their similarities and differences.

This is also important for “breaking the mold” of traditional leadership whereby schools and kura may appoint leaders who meet strict criteria. Through celebrating success through diversity and harnessing the strengths of individuals, all rangatahi have the opportunities to enact positive change and build meaningful connections.



The wider education sector



Continual reflection

Nothing at Puāwai is done for the sake of it or to tick a box. Everything is purposefully curated to meaningfully add to the leadership journey and develop young people. Continual reflection is essential to ensure that all aspects of the programme achieve these goals. This is achieved through evaluation with the rangatahi and ensuring that the programme is strongly aligned with their needs and capabilities.

This means that Puāwai has gone through a gradual change in line with the feedback from rangatahi, improving its impact and outcomes.



Whakapā mai | Get in touch

We welcome ongoing feedback on how you have used this resource and what suggestions you would like to contribute. Please email:

growwaitaha@gmail.com

