

Activity Centre Review Report

Activity Centre Name	Te Ara
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Profile Number	6128
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Background

Introduction

Te Ara is one of 14 Activity Centres in New Zealand that cater for secondary school students (Years 9 to 13) who are at risk of disengaging from mainstream schooling and at risk of low educational, social and vocational outcomes.

Activity Centres provide a specialised learning programme which will lead to increased attendance, engagement and achievement at school, social outcomes and successful transition rates. Two registered teachers and two tutors support students to increase their achievement and engagement in education guided by an Individual Learning Programme (ILP) which is responsive to the needs of each student. The ILP details the student's learning goals and is developed in partnership with the student, liaison tutor, parents/whānau and enrolling school. A key component of the programme for activity centre students is to successfully transition back into the enrolling school or move on to further education or employment.

Wellington's St Patrick's College is the managing school for this activity centre. The school's Board of Trustees holds governance responsibility for the Activity Centre and is responsible for providing high quality educational service, in a physically and emotionally safe learning environment.

Terms of Reference

This review is based on an evaluation of the performance of Te Ara in relation to the terms of reference developed with the Ministry of Education. The terms of reference are:

- management and governance practices including planning, internal evaluation and professional capacity building
- the use of information to plan and implement individual programmes for, and with, students, and to monitor their progress
- support for students to achieve improved social and educational outcomes
- educational and social outcomes for students, including the extent to which students' learning has been accelerated
- students' experience of interagency support for them and their families
- transitions in and out of the Activity Centre.

The key evaluative question is:

How effective is this Activity Centre at achieving positive outcomes for students?

Context

The Wellington Activity Centre was established in 1987 for secondary students experiencing problems with schooling and in need of alternative options. Recently it has been re-branded as Te Ara. It was created by the ten secondary schools in the greater Wellington area and is attached to them for administrative purposes. The host school for the centre changes every three years.

Te Ara provides education for up to 20 students who require a specialised learning programme that will lead to increased attendance, engagement and achievement at school. Support continues until they, their families and whānau, centre staff and their enrolling school decide that they are sufficiently well equipped to return to mainstream schooling or move on to further education and training.

At the time of the review there were ten students on the roll, four of whom were Māori and six Pākehā. Three were female and seven male.

Centre staff foster close links with parents and whānau, community groups and external agencies. Staff source substantial funding from a range of sources to supplement the MoE grant. These additional grants enable the centre to employ extra staff who help to provide high quality learning resources and opportunities and promote positive outcomes for students.

A charitable trust has been established to support the work of Te Ara. The support is often in practical ways such as strategic advice, providing mentoring skills and funding the development of an assessment tool.

The premises have recently been significantly upgraded and now offer a modern learning environment for the students.

Findings

How effective is the Activity Centre at achieving positive outcomes for students?

Te Ara very effectively achieves positive outcomes for all of its students. The centre is well led by an experienced director. All staff work together and act as liaison tutors for specific students. Positive relations are developed and students usually enjoy one-to-one support for academic and social development.

The 2016 achievement information is indicative of Te Ara's success. Of the 20 students, 10 returned to the same school, three to alternative education, two to training, one employment and one to another school outside the region. The remaining three returned to Te Ara in 2017.

Almost all students had an attendance level above 80%. Given that attendance was a reason for referral, this is a positive indication of the level of engagement. There is also reliable evidence that most students progressed well in literacy and numeracy and a number made accelerated progress.

A strength of the centre is that eight of the ten referring schools have used the service in the past year. This is a clear indication of local confidence in the centre. Staff are actively promoting its value to the remaining two schools.

A key strategic goal was to make the centre a violence-free place. Measures taken to support this included the updating of relevant policies, professional development on maintaining a bully-free workplace and staff being proactive in creating a calm, work-focused environment.

What is the quality of governance and leadership of the Activity Centre?

Wellington's St Patrick's College has recently become the current managing school and the rector maintains close contact with the centre. There is an appropriate and current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with each enrolling school. This outlines the criteria for enrolled schools, the responsibilities of the centre, the enrolled school and the student.

The new managing school rector has yet to establish an appraisal process for the director who is responsible for staff appraisal.

St Patrick's College board takes an active interest in the centre. The deputy board chair has visited Te Ara. Trustees receive informative reports from the director on a regular basis. These give detailed information on student numbers, year levels and their referring school. Student academic and social progress and readiness for transition inform the board of the value of this centre. The board is also advised of the programmes other than literacy and numeracy being offered. Staffing, professional development, property and finance are also reported.

The advisory committee consists of three principals: one from the previous managing school; the current managing school rector; and the principal of the next scheduled managing school. This provides continuity and, over time, involves every enrolling school. The committee and the director communicate well with all enrolling schools.

How effective are the selection and transition processes?

The enrolling schools nominate students for selection based on the criteria in the Memorandum of Understanding. These criteria are sufficiently carefully followed that few, if any, students have not been initially accepted.

The well-managed enrolment process begins with an informal visit by the student, whānau and a representative of the enrolling school. At this time they are introduced to the concept and expectations. There is time for the student and whānau to reflect on whether this centre will make a difference and the student will be comfortable with the kawa of the centre. Following an enrolment meeting there is a ten day trial, during which the student has to meet certain expectations and show they are committed to attending Te Ara. There is a further opportunity to reconsider after a ten-day trial.

The quality of school information is variable, but usually the schools provide a sound platform for Te Ara to quickly establish an appropriate learning programme and an ILP is developed by all parties. In this way, the selection and transition processes are smooth and lead to settled students who readily become group members.

Students benefit from local volunteers who assist selected individual students. They provide academic tutoring and also strong support for transition towards long-term goals.

How well does the Activity Centre identify the social, emotional and academic needs of each student?

There are clear expectations of the information enrolling schools should provide about students who are transitioning in to Te Ara. Usually these guidelines are well adhered to.

One of Te Ara's many strengths is the development of a dashboard that enables close monitoring of the students' academic, social and emotional wellbeing. This programme (Thrive) has been developed over the past five years and is also being trialled overseas. The charitable trust board has financed and patented the research and development of this tool. It is shared with the student to enhance their capacity to thrive. A range of data is collated by the programme and a graphic display of the outcomes provides visual evidence of progress. This tool enables Te Ara staff to successfully identify the social, emotional and academic needs of each student.

The ILPs are regularly updated with Thrive strategies, indicators and progress notes. The dashboard and ILP records academic results, including from a literacy programme that provides sufficient breakdown of areas to enable targeted teaching of developmental areas.

Experienced staff capably develop close relationships with students to identify social and emotional needs. They are supported, if necessary, by Kotahitanga (Psychology Services) based on site. The school also receives support from Evolve which enables students to have good, quick access to health support. The centre director has reported to the Ministry of Education, the need for increased access to appropriate support for student mental wellness.

The calm, settled tone supports students' emotional wellbeing. Students interact positively and Te Ara reports there are few behavioural issues in the centre. There continues to be some truancy, but there is also evidence that some students with previously high rates of school truancy are now attending more regularly.

How well do the specialised learning programmes meet the needs of each student?

The careful selection process and robust initial testing enables Te Ara to quickly identify the students' academic level and specific areas for development.

Academic results are high. Most have demonstrated a lift in numeracy and literacy and some have made significant progress towards NCEA level 1 achievement. Students are very well supported by staff members, each bringing their own field of expertise and subject knowledge and providing appropriate course pathways.

Very good professional development is available for staff to sustain capability. They are well regarded by parents and community members.

Each of the Te Ara staff brings a diversity of cultural knowledge and experience that closely mirrors the ethnicity of its students. The Māori staff member regularly uses te reo Māori and works with other staff to foster respect and cultural responsiveness. The wellbeing of Māori (and all students) is clearly evident.

How effectively are students prepared for their future pathways?

The centre has a strong focus on establishing future pathways for the students. The priority is for transition and re-engagement at school with a clear understanding of the purpose of school education. Te Ara also provides a well-designed careers programme that enables students to develop long-term goals and interests. There is sound evidence that this programme is successful as almost every student who left the centre in 2016 transitioned back to school, to further education or to employment.



Alan Wynyard
Deputy Chief Review Officer Central (Acting)

16 October 2017

About the Activity Centre

Location	Wellington	
Ministry of Education profile number	6128	
Activity Centre roll	10	
Gender composition	Male 7, Female 3	
Ethnic composition	Pākehā	6
	Māori	4
Review team on site	August 2017	
Date of this report		
Most recent ERO reports	Education Review Special Review Special Review	December 2012 December 2008 June 2005