

At a glance:

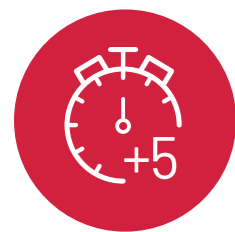
# Active schools and kura

Research shows that physical activity can lift ākongā engagement, attendance, achievement and wellbeing.

**This resource shares evidence-based, practical approaches you can take to ensure every ākongā has quality opportunities to be active.**

## The evidence shows physical activity:

- 1** Enhances academic achievement
- 2** Boosts brain function and cognition
- 3** Improves engagement and attendance
- 4** Supports mental health and wellbeing



### 5 hours

of increased on-task time per week can be achieved by integrating physical activity into classroom time.



### 97.5%

of survey respondents (principals, teachers and curriculum leaders) in a New Zealand study believed that education outside the classroom improved student engagement.



### 4 months

of additional learning gains in spelling and maths can be achieved when physical activity is integrated into students' learning.



### 56%

of students who continued sport participation from childhood to adolescence had lower odds of absenteeism.



### 5 minutes

of being active in nature can boost mental wellbeing.

*Active Bodies, Active Minds report. The Value of Blue and Green Spaces report.*

## Positive trends

- Ākongā activity levels are recovering post-pandemic.
- Ākongā are most active during break times and enjoy playing freely with friends.
- Evidence shows being active helps ākongā feel happier, more included and connected at school.
- Māori and Pacific ākongā are among the most active.

## Considerations

- Ākongā are mostly put off being active for social reasons. They say the biggest issue is when others cheat or are unkind (65%), when they feel left out (41%) or when they don't get a turn (41%).
- Ākongā want more chances to play, better places to be active and more activities to choose from.
- Older ākongā (years 7 to 8) are not as active as younger ākongā (years 4 to 6).
- Girls face more social related barriers to being active than boys.
- Disabled ākongā and some ethnic groups, such as Asian young people, are less active and face more challenges to be active.

*Active NZ Survey 2024/25, Voice of Tamariki 2025*

# What school leaders can do

## 1 Champion physical activity

- Ensure quality physical activity and wellbeing are prioritised within your school's strategic planning, timetables and resourcing.
- Provide professional learning and development opportunities so kaiako can deliver inclusive physical activity for all ākonga.
- Create a welcoming, inclusive environment for all ākonga to be active.

**“ Seeing the kids turn out all representing their culture, and all the staff taking part making sure the kids all feel included, was awesome. ”**

School leader on the success of a cultural Olympics day

## 2 Make time for movement

- Prioritise physical activity, energisers, free play and education outside the classroom in the curriculum.
- Support kaiako to integrate physical activity across other curriculum areas.
- Encourage active transport like walking, biking or scootering to and from school or kura.

**“ Have you got time to get outside and continue with what you are doing in the classroom? If it is in a worksheet, you can cut it up and turn it into a movement activity. ”**

Healthy Active Learning Advisor

## 3 Build connection to spaces and places

- Design and prioritise physical activities that connect ākonga to culture, whakapapa, te taiao and pūrākau.
- Use local blue and green spaces like rivers, bush and parks to support physical and mental wellbeing, cognitive development and cultural connection.
- Involve whānau in planning and creating experiences that reflect their unique skills, knowledge and culture.
- Consider opening school facilities to whānau and the community before and after school.

**“ The taura don't want to stay in the classroom. We see and hear that it is better for them to be in the taiao. ”**

Kaiako

## 4 Help grow confidence and belonging

- Offer inclusive, low-pressure, fun, whole-school events to help ākonga build confidence and feel like they belong.
- Involve ākonga in designing break-time activities and managing equipment. Establish a physical activity ākonga leadership group.
- Explore how events like cross-country and athletics can involve all ākonga and support your school's goals and values.

## 6 Celebrate school values through sport

- Reinforce school values when sharing sport successes in newsletters and on social media.
- Celebrate ākonga who demonstrate positive behaviours on and off the field.

## 5 Break down barriers

- Reduce cost, access and equipment barriers through subsidies, gear libraries, loose play part boxes, transport support and local partnerships.
- Use local blue and green spaces for easy to access, low-cost activity options that also support improved wellbeing.

## 7 Measure what matters

- Use research and your own school-level data to understand impact, identify gaps and guide future decisions and investment in physical activity initiatives.

# Insights from a programme in schools and kura

**Healthy Active Learning** is a joint government initiative that supports schools and kura to improve the wellbeing of tamariki through healthy eating and drinking, and quality physical activity.

Evaluation shows:

- Embedding physical activity and healthy eating into your school's strategies, plans and curriculum strengthens movement, connection between whānau and sense of belonging. This ensures school is a place ākonga want to be, supporting attendance.
- Physical activity is a proven way to improve engagement and wellbeing across the whole school community.



**“ Our hauroa sits in everything we do. It's part of our strategic plan, our annual plan, our strategic goals, everything. It's the embodiment of the school. ”**

Assistant Tumuaki

## Take the next step

Explore these reports, resources and case studies to help strengthen your school's approach to movement, engagement, attendance and wellbeing.



### Research

[Active Bodies, Active Minds report](#)

[Voice of Tamariki 2025](#)

[Student Voice report 2025](#)

[Active NZ Survey 2024/25 results](#)

[The Value of Blue and Green Spaces report](#)

### Resources

[Reviewing your school's physical activity approach](#)

[MoveWell](#)

[Increasing Community Access to Schools Toolkit](#)

### Case studies

[Pūrākau in motion](#)  
- James Cook School

[Engaging ākonga in maths through physical activity](#)  
- Pāmapūria School

[Learning through connecting with te taiao](#)  
- Te Kura o Te Muriwai

[School surfing programme making waves in Tairāwhiti](#)

[Creating a culture of play](#)  
- Paekākāriki School

[One teacher's mission to revitalise PE](#)  
- Rhode Street School