

# Empowering ākonga to conquer bullying

Two 'Bullying Prevention Superstar' schools talk about their approach to fostering safe and inclusive environments, with students leading the charge.

**A**t Manurewa Intermediate School, it's all about positivity and self-acceptance, a culture that keeps rates of attendance and achievement high, and students actively deterring bullying.

Thirteen-year-old Reign's first few months at intermediate school were clouded by negative experiences on social media. A year on, however, she uses social media only occasionally – always in a positive way – and is a picture of joy and confidence, all of which she attributes to the school's supportive culture.

The school-wide wellbeing mahi is led by deputy principal Thomas Bartlett, who heads up e-learning and pastoral care.

## Multi-faceted approach

Approaches to prevent bullying are multi-faceted, and for Manurewa Intermediate, that starts with leadership.

"I'm head of behaviour management, keeping students happy in the school," says Thomas.

Strategies include keeping the school's physical environment pristine, so learners feel welcome and valued, and involving students in every aspect of school organisation.

There are five student councils, one each for pastoral care, culture, community, eco and curriculum; each comprising 10 students and a deputy or assistant principal.



Reign is on the Pastoral Care Council. Councillors are easily visible to other students through pictures on school walls.

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Thomas Bartlett

Councillors all attend a leadership camp to learn about how bullying can affect others, teamwork and problem solving

“We learn to look after ourselves and each other, to do our best to solve our problems and if we can’t, to get an adult to help,” says Reign, who is on the Pastoral Care (PC) Council.

Councils meet each week to work on ways to improve all aspects of school life, with suggestions put forward by other students.

For example, when concern was raised about the state of school toilets, Reign and her fellow PC councillors created a roster for checking on the toilets during break periods.

“We were able to get information on what was going on, and the messing up stopped,” says Thomas.

Classes take turns to be ‘MI (Manurewa Intermediate) Mates’ which involves donning green jackets and walking around the school to help support people who are feeling sad or need help.

### **Promoting positive behaviour**

Creating a safe and supportive environment is fundamental to Manurewa Intermediate. The school promotes positive behaviour through competition between its four whānau – Kōwhai, Rimu, Kauri and Tawa.

Thomas explains, “We have competitions for attendance, for lates, for healthy eating, for uniform, and more. I announce all those awards every week at assembly, with each whānau vying for the highest scores. Whoever wins gets to do their chant in assembly and that’s huge for them.”

School buildings are peppered with welcoming messaging and advice on keeping safe in both physical and virtual spaces.

Thomas also emphasises that a strong school-whānau partnership is crucial.

“We ring home constantly. We have whānau leaders who follow up and we visit home. Our attendance rate is 93 percent, unheard of in most schools. Our average ‘attending regularly’ numbers from term 1 this year are



**Top:** Thomas coaches basketball four afternoons a week.

**Bottom:** Reign has gained confidence and self-respect since joining the school’s basketball team.



Competition between the four school whānau – Kōwhhai, Rimu, Kauri and Tawa – is intense.

higher than all other schools in New Zealand.”

It’s all about building student confidence and resilience, says Thomas.

“I have a lot of one-on-one conversations with our students, but I never blame or shame them. I give them a lot of opportunities to change, and I tell them that I trust them to make the right decision.

“We say, ‘Don’t worry about what’s happening on social media, just be yourself. Don’t compare yourself with others,’” explains Thomas.

It was this advice that was key to Reign conquering her unhealthy attachment to social media and gaining confidence.

“In Year 7, I had Instagram and you could say I didn’t use it properly. There was a lot of drama with girls at school. Then Mr Bartlett put me in a basketball programme so I could focus on sport and get off social media. At first, I was scared to play, but now I love basketball. It’s made me more confident about going to school and more focused on my work. If I’m not playing basketball, I’m helping Mum because I feel good.”

Reign was so inspired by Thomas’ encouragement and leadership that she nominated him for an award during Bullying-Free NZ Week. Thomas was named Bullying Prevention Superstar and won \$2,000 worth of Prezzy cards for the school to spend on students.

### Whole-school approach

Whangārei Girls’ High School took out all three prizes in the secondary schools’ category of the Bullying-Free NZ Week competition.

Jodie Wendt, who heads the school’s Health Education programme, says a whole school approach to bullying prevention is in place.

“It is everyone’s role – students, staff and community – to ensure that bullying behaviour is minimised. We have a range of student-led groups in our school that work alongside staff and other students to create a safe school environment. These include Pride Hub and the Health and Wellbeing Committee.

“These student-led groups are essential as the students are the most powerful ambassadors for change.”

At the beginning of the year, the school created its first Wellbeing Expo Day, bringing together external providers and youth support groups to promote positive wellbeing.

“The expo aligned with Pink Shirt Day and was a wonderful display of our school values and our overall focus around wellbeing.

“We put together a learning pack for all whānau classes to carry out Pink Shirt Day discussion, activities and competitions which helped get the whole school involved. We haven’t done it to this extent before and we have truly seen a positive impact.

“Unfortunately for our youth, they have been exposed to bullying behaviours from the adult world and there isn’t always good role modelling for our young people.

“We focus learning on role modelling kindness alongside student responsibility to help our students generate the power to be upstanders and address bullying right away,” says Jodie. ▲

Positive messaging is clear and consistent in school signage.



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Jodie Wendt

Information, resources, and tools to help build a safe, bullying-free environment are available at [bullyingfree.nz](https://bullyingfree.nz).



A new tool to help schools select a bullying prevention programme is also now up on the website, with a step-by-step approach to fit the school’s unique context.

## Bullying-Free NZ Week

The annual nationwide Bullying-Free NZ Week (BFNZ Week) was held this year on 17-21 May on the theme ‘He kōtuinga mahi iti, he hua pai-ā rau: small ripples create big waves’.

The focus was on acting to prevent bullying in schools through student leadership, agency and voice, and by implementing bullying prevention and response initiatives.

Students were asked to show how they’re working with others to create an environment that’s caring and respectful, where everyone feels welcome and that they belong. There were two competition categories, Year 1-8 (primary) and Year 9-13 (secondary).

Students were also able to nominate their ‘Bullying Prevention Superstar’, which could be a staff member or someone from the community who works extra hard to help everyone at their school or kura feel welcome.

Sticks ‘n Stones, a youth-led bullying-prevention organisation, also worked with students to create action packs for the week, and to judge competition entries.

# Education Gazette

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