

2026

ANNUAL REPORT

UNITED AND UNDAUNTED



NZEI
TE RIU ROA

NZEI Te Riu Roa Area Councils (AC) Branches (BR) Aronui Tōmua (AT 1–27)

AC TE PĪPĪRI MANANUI O NGĀ TĀTAHA A MĀUI COMPRISES OF ARONUI TŌMUA 1-13

- AT-1 Te Hiku o te Ika
- AT-2 Hokianga ki Taumarere
- AT-3 Manaia ki Tutamoe
- AT-4 Tāmaki Makaurau
- AT-5 Manukau Whānui
- AT-6 Te Mangai Maori Waikato
- AT-7 Tauranga-Moana
- AT-8 Te Rohe Pōtae
- AT-9 Tokoroa
- AT-10 Rotorua
- AT-11 Mataatua
- AT-12 Manaakitia o Opotiki
- AT-13 Te Whānau a Apanui

AC WAIKATO

- BR Cambridge
- BR Central King Country
- BR Coromandel Peninsula
- BR Huntly
- BR Matamata
- BR Piako
- BR Thames
- BR Tokoroa
- BR Waihi
- BR Waikato
- BR Waipa

AC TARANAKI

- AT-14 Parininihi ki Taipake
- BR North Taranaki
- BR Patea-Waverley
- BR South Taranaki

AC AUCKLAND CENTRAL

- BR Auckland
- BR Hibiscus Coast
- BR Komiti Pasifika - Auckland
- BR North Shore
- BR West Auckland

AC COUNTIES MANUKAU

- BR Franklin
- BR Howick
- BR Manurewa
- BR Otahuhu
- BR Papakura
- BR Papatoetoe
- BR Waiuku

AC TE HAUNUI CENTRAL

- AT-15 Ruapehu
- AT-16 Whanganui
- AT-17 Manawātū
- BR Feilding
- BR Horowhenua
- BR Manawatu
- BR Rangitikei
- BR Taihape
- BR Whanganui

AC TE TAI TOKERAU

- BR Bay Of Islands
- BR Far North
- BR Hokianga
- BR Kaipara
- BR Northern Wairoa
- BR Rodney-Otamatea
- BR Whangarei

AC BAY OF PLENTY

- BR Murupara
- BR Opotiki
- BR Rotorua
- BR Taupo
- BR Tauranga
- BR Te Puke
- BR Turangi
- BR Whakatane

AC TE TAU IHU O TE WAKA A MĀUI

- AT-24 Whakatu-Motueka-Mohua
- BR Buller
- BR Golden Bay
- BR Marlborough
- BR Motueka
- BR Nelson

AC OTAGO

- AT-26 Otago
- BR Central Otago
- BR Otago
- BR South Otago
- BR Waitaki

AC WAITAHA

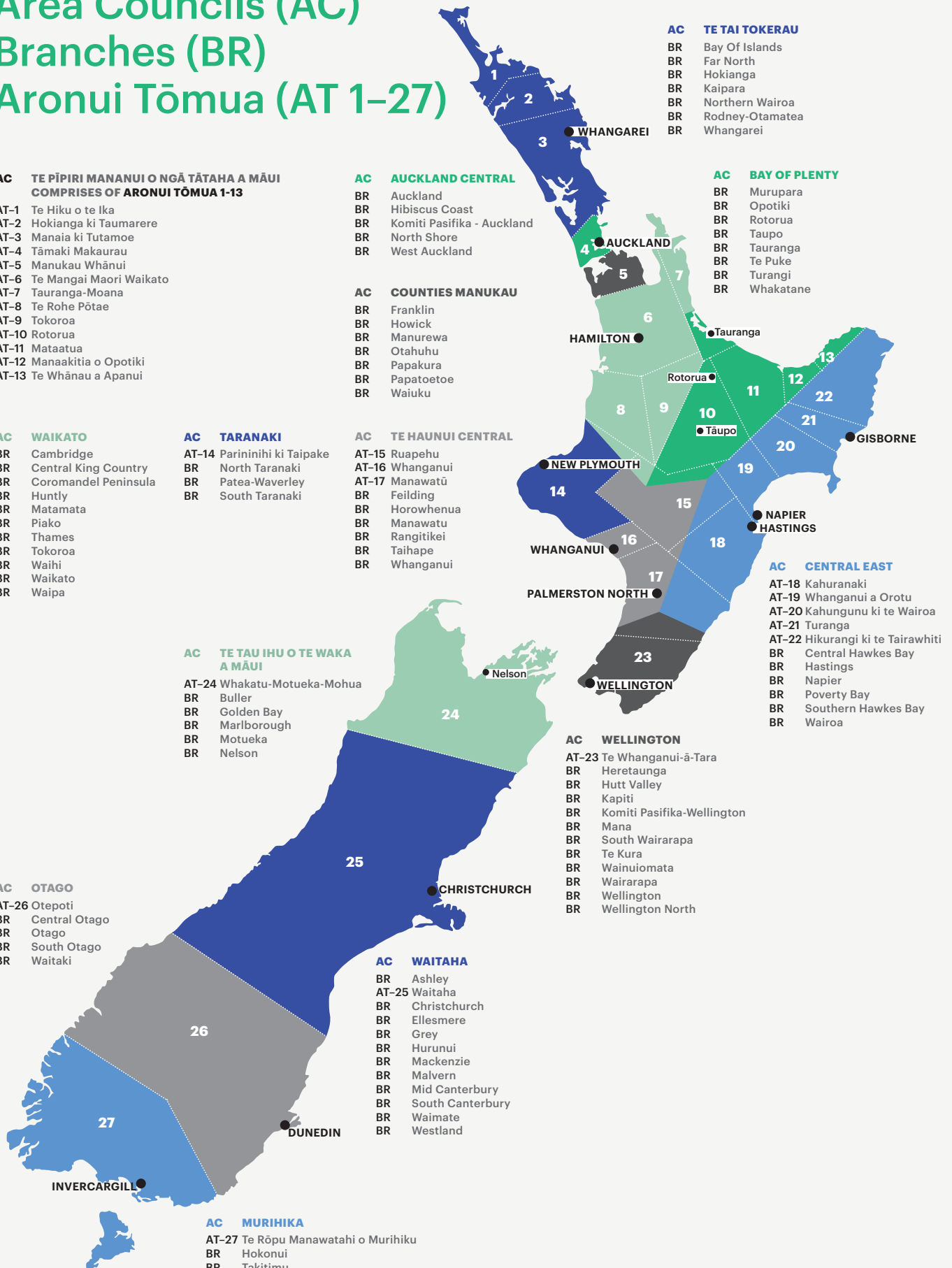
- BR Ashley
- AT-25 Waitaha
- BR Christchurch
- BR Ellesmere
- BR Grey
- BR Hurunui
- BR Mackenzie
- BR Malvern
- BR Mid Canterbury
- BR South Canterbury
- BR Waimate
- BR Westland

AC WELLINGTON

- AT-23 Te Whanganui-ā-Tara
- BR Heretaunga
- BR Hutt Valley
- BR Kapiti
- BR Komiti Pasifika-Wellington
- BR Mana
- BR South Wairarapa
- BR Te Kura
- BR Wainuiomata
- BR Wairarapa
- BR Wellington
- BR Wellington North

AC CENTRAL EAST

- AT-18 Kahuranaki
- AT-19 Whanganui a Orotu
- AT-20 Kahungunu ki te Wairoa
- AT-21 Turanga
- AT-22 Hikurangi ki te Tairāwhiti
- BR Central Hawkes Bay
- BR Hastings
- BR Napier
- BR Poverty Bay
- BR Southern Hawkes Bay
- BR Wairoa



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Message from Te Manukura | President

Kei runga te kōrero, kei raro te rahurahu.

Appeasing words above, but meddling below

This whakatauki speaks to the integrity of what we say and do. It reminds us to be true to our intentions. While this whakatauki was spoken by the Ngati Awa chief Tamatearehe over 200 years ago, it is just as relevant now as it was then.

One hundred and forty-three years ago, 18 male teachers met in Christchurch to found NZEI Te Riu Roa. Bound by solidarity and encouraged by new legal protections, they shared a vision: to advocate for our learners and our profession.

Today, we are a powerful union of around 50,000 educators and education workers spanning primary, area, and secondary schools, early childhood education, learning support, and school advisory services. Just as Aotearoa has grown, we too have evolved. Our union now mirrors the vibrant diversity of modern New Zealand society.

We maintain strong connections with other unions here and overseas, standing shoulder to shoulder with tens of thousands of working New Zealanders in the 23 October mega strike. We have grown into a formidable political force, yet that original vision remains our unwavering anchor.

Over the past year, we witnessed an unprecedented series of challenges. Alongside sweeping curriculum changes and funding cuts that dissolved vital services like Resource Teachers Literacy and Resource Teachers Māori, the Government has attempted to weaken and downgrade Te Tiriti o Waitangi in education. They even attempted to undermine our collective unity by promulgating individual employment agreements during primary teacher bargaining, and docked the pay of our Ministry of Education Field Staff members during their partial strike.

In the face of these blatant attacks, we stayed united and undaunted. Our advocacy for our tamariki and our profession defines who we are.

Below: The NZEI Te Riu Roa National Executive, led by then President William Newton (centre), during a break at the 1909 Annual Meeting.





Above: We are a powerful union of around 50,000 educators and education workers spanning primary, area, and secondary schools, early childhood education, learning support, and school advisory services.

Through our collective advocacy, we secured critical wins. We pushed, and we prevailed, on the unworkable curriculum change timeline, forcing a Ministerial backdown that delayed full implementation across six learning areas by two years to 2029. Following an urgent inquiry, the Waitangi Tribunal made findings strongly in our favour, ruling that the Crown breached Te Tiriti and recommending an immediate pause on further changes to the Education and Training Act.

On the industrial side, our collective strength delivered some hard-won financial gains in spite of the hostile political environment and Government's tight bargaining parameters. Our principal members won a key claim - a change management allowance - alongside pay increases. Primary and kindergarten teachers and support staff secured 2.5% pay increases, teachers safeguarded the pay parity clause union members fought for decades to win - and primary teachers won parity of unit value. Furthermore, we won recognition for educators as critical fuel users, secured remediation funding for

schools with asbestos contamination, and successfully argued for extended funding for the school lunches programme.

While we have stood firm, our advocacy together is far from over. Significant challenges lie ahead as the sector faces ongoing underfunding, shifting political agendas, and persistent pressures on our workforce. To navigate what comes next, our solidarity cannot waver.

As we look to the future, we must continue to be responsive to those who ask: what does being part of this union mean for me? The answer is clear: knowing you do not stand alone against systemic pressures; having a collective voice that cannot be silenced; and holding the power to shape the future of our profession.

Our power lies in our collective strength. This is the true value of our union. Together, we protect the future of quality public education in Aotearoa.

Ripeka Lessels
Te Manukura | President,



Message from Korimako Tangiata | National Secretary

He toka tū moana: a rock standing firm in the sea

When times are tough, we have two jobs at NZEI Te Riu Roa: to stand steadfast to our values and to stay strong against the elements whirling around us; and to uphold hope and a plan to build a more positive future.

We're not here for a short time or a three-year electoral cycle. Instead, our timeframes are inter-generational, because we are serving generations of tamariki and educators.

That doesn't mean we want to stand still or lack a sense of the urgency about the changes we want to see. But it means we take the long view because we know that making change in our system – and really embedding it – takes time, and that winning the hearts and minds of educators themselves matters.

Over the last year, we've stood up for our values – on the street, in the courts, at Parliament, and in our communities. Tens of thousands of us took to the streets during last October's megastrike. 40,000 of us signed the Kimi Haeata petition, and 1,300 kaiako submitted against proposals to remove pay parity. Hundreds of principals across the country wrote open letters calling for a pause on the curriculum changes. Resource Teachers of Māori and Literacy went to the Court of Appeal to uphold the mana of their work. Learning Support members challenged the Ministry docking their pay for taking partial strike action on the streets and in the Employment Court. We picketed, marched, joined the People's Select Committee, and challenged the gutting of pay equity legislation in the High Court. And we went to the

Waitangi Tribunal and received a ringing endorsement of our concerns about the removal of school boards' responsibility to give effect to Te Tiriti and the Government's failure to consult on the curriculum.

None of this would be possible for individuals; it is only together that members have the power to stand up and push back.

We face a critical election on November 7. Re-election of the current coalition is likely to embed standardised education and high-stakes assessment, de-professionalisation of teaching, de-funding of pay parity, and continued attacks on unions, workers' rights, and members' pay and conditions. Worse, the current government has no plan to address the cost of living or the impact of poverty on our children. The wealthy end of town is funding an agenda of increased privatisation of our education system that benefits overseas edutech companies and publishers but not our kids.

So where is the hope – the light at the end of the tunnel? Hope for our union is firmly grounded in knowing that we have succeeded in the past, we have a vision for the future, and we have clear priorities – our Kimi Haeta goals – around which we can mobilise and organise. The challenge – whether the political winds change or stay the same – is to build connections and networks, grow our membership and allies, build power and respect, and ensure we have a clear plan to win. Political parties do not lead change; real change depends on us. As Barack Obama said, "We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Stephanie Mills
Korimako Tangiata | National Secretary

Who we are

We are a union of around 50,000 kaiako, tumuaki, specialist staff, and support staff – from early childhood, puna reo and kōhanga reo to primary, kura, wharekura, area and secondary schools, and Ministry of Education Learning Support and school advisory services. Supported by staff operating from our Wellington head office and nine regional offices, we stand up for those who support our learners and fight for the future of education.

Our purpose

Whakamana kaiako. Whakamana tamariki.

Our vision is to be the most powerful collective of educators in Aotearoa, firmly focused on upholding the mana and value of teaching, learning, and everyone who works in education.

We advocate for system change to build a strong, vibrant, and well-resourced education system – one that upholds the rangatiratanga of all mokopuna and empowers them to reach their full potential.

Mōku te Ao is our vision for a system where tamariki Māori are put first – because when they succeed, all children succeed.

Ngā pou o Mōku te Ao are the way NZEI Te Riu Roa brings to life our commitment to Te Tiriti. The pou are foundational criteria for what we work on and how we work.

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

Ngā pou

The values that guide our work

Whakamana

Honouring identity, language and whenua to give power and authority to others by maintaining Mana

Whanaungatanga

Obligations based on relationships linking individuals to generations based on kin and non-kin and built on experience and place which is in practice whakawhanaungatanga

Rangatiratanga

The right to autonomy by controlling your own aspirations and destiny

Whakapapa

Geneology, lineage, descent, kinship and status

Manaakitanga

Duty of care to support and uplift others with kindness, generosity and respect

Wairuatanga

The spiritual dimensions of thinking, being, doing and connecting through time and space

Kaitiakitanga

A connection between human kind and the natural world which is a role of guardianship

Tikanga

To follow tikanga is to follow processes that are right and based on rites

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

Te Kahu Kiwi

How our governance works

Governance in our union provides the member leadership, oversight, and decision-making responsibility required for our strategic direction and financial health. This remains distinct from daily operations, which are a staff responsibility.

The purpose of Te Kahu Kiwi, our governance meeting, is to develop an equitable partnership in decision-making power between Tangata Whenua and Tangata Tiriti, bringing to life our commitment to Te Tiriti and tino rangatiratanga.

The meaning behind Te Kahu Kiwi

Te Kahu Kiwi is our peak leadership and governance meeting where key strategic decisions about the union and our work are made.

A kahu is a cloak and Te Kahu Kiwi is the most precious of all, woven entirely from kiwi feathers. For this rōpū, the ingoa means that every individual feather adds unique strength and beauty to the cloak, which figuratively wraps around NZEI Te Riu Roa.

Our governance in action

Established in January 2024, Te Kahu Kiwi brings together our two governance bodies – National Executive and Te Reo Areare – to make joint decisions. The group typically holds two-day hui four to six times a year, putting Te Tiriti partnership into practice within our union. At Hui-ā-Tau 2025, members approved a new constitution to formally embed Te Kahu Kiwi into our rules.



NZEI Te Riu Roa Te Kahu Kiwi 2026: Front row (from left to right) Winnifred Morris, Tiri Bailey, O'Sonia Hotereni, Ripeka Lessels, Paeone Goonan, Phonderly Siohane, Raewyn Himona, Takarihi Temarama; Middle row (from left to right) Max Thompson, Te Aroha Hiko, Lovi Collier, Michelle Haua, Margaret Nicholas, Tinaka Jopson, Rowena Timoti, Conor Fraser; Back row (from left to right) Rongopai Kira, Te Whakakotahitanga Jenkins, Megan White, Zane McCarthy, Barb Curran, Annie Te Moana, Serena Mata, Alexandra (Ally) Kingi, Tute Mila, Martyn Weatherill, Maihi Parkinson

Inside the National Executive

The National Executive is the national governance body of NZEI Te Riu Roa. It consists of 11 elected members and three kaihautū (leaders) nominated from Te Reo Areare – one of whom must represent early childhood education.

To ensure diverse sector voices are heard and included in union decision-making, five of the 11 seats are designated for specific sectors: principals, primary and area school teachers, support staff, Ministry of Education Learning Support staff, and early childhood education. (The most recent addition, the Ministry of Education Learning Support seat, saw its first representative elected at the 2022 Hui-ā-Tau.) The remaining six are general seats. The National Executive is elected every two years at Hui-ā-Tau (annual general meeting).

Inside Te Reo Areare

Te Reo Areare is the Māori governance body of the union, made up of 19 selected member leaders nominated from their rohe and confirmed at Te Kāhui Whetū every two years.

The body includes 12 rohe representatives (drawn from all sectors), three early childhood education representatives, one Te Kupenga Rangatahi, one Kaiāwhina Tautoko, and two Kaumatua.

The leadership of Te Manuhia

Te Manuhia brings together our three National Executive leaders – the current president, vice president, and past president – and three kaihautū of Te Reo Areare.

The group takes its name from the sacred huia bird, a guardian of the 12th heaven climbed by Tawhaki. Historically, the white-tipped feathers of the huia were so highly valued they were worn exclusively by chiefs, particularly the women. In Māori culture, the huia possesses both the oratory and leadership skills demonstrated by this leadership team.

Te Manuhia shares leadership of Te Kahu Kiwi by setting agendas and facilitating meetings. They also act as a senior leadership group to support the president and provide guidance between Te Kahu Kiwi meetings.

Our consensus decision-making

Te Kahu Kiwi operates by consensus. Decisions are reached by finding solutions that everyone agrees with or, at the very least, can support. This requires open debate and honest conversation to talk through different perspectives. Making decisions by consensus builds shared power, creating a stronger and more united union.

Te Reo Areare Report

Co-Governance – Our Way

Two leadership groups – Te Reo Areare and the National Executive – have come together to form the organisation’s unified governing body, Te Kahu Kiwi, as a result of our constitutional changes at Hui-ā-Tau in 2025. National Executive members continue to navigate this path, while members of Te Reo Areare have successfully adapted to this new governance structure.

Iwi relationships

Beginning with the powhiri at Waiwhetū Marae for Te Manukura Hou, iwi relationships have been a high priority on our agenda. Building on the connections cultivated during Te Kāhui Whetū, we are focused on deepening our relationship with Te Āti Awa. *Rangatira ki te Rangatira* was the kōrero from the kaumātua – a clear directive to always engage leader-to-leader, ensuring our highest leadership guides these important discussions. In building this relationship, we recognise that like any kawenata, this covenant is lifelong and thrives on continuous care. We look forward to ensuring our kōrero and actions reflect this standard of *Rangatira ki te Rangatira*.

World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education

During our attendance at the World Indigenous Peoples’ Conference on Education (WIPCE) in Tāmaki Makaurau, we learnt that how we teach, learn, and lead indigenous knowledge is precisely the education our children need. In the workshops, students from local kura and Kamehameha College demonstrated such deep cultural grounding that teaching and learning flowed naturally from them. Experiencing this left us feeling empowered and strengthened in our own cultural competence.

We believe that an education system based on rangatiratanga centres tamariki Māori — with rights to control their own aspirations and destiny — and would work for all children through values of mutual benefit to society.



MANAAKITANGA
SUPPORTING
OUR
MEMBERS



Member Support Centre

Your Member Support Centre (0800 NZEI HELP) and Principal Support Line (0508 PRINCIPAL) provide pastoral and industrial support, advice, and guidance via phone and email. Over the past year, we responded to more than 13,000 initial calls and emails from members.

These queries range from straightforward questions about collective agreement entitlements or updates to contact details to complex cases involving disciplinary processes and workplace conflict.

Our call and email volumes peaked during major campaigns, including the recent support staff and primary teacher negotiations. Early in the 2026 calendar year, we also noted a significant increase in relationship-based issues. Because these

“Thank you for everything you have done for me! All of you have been fantastic.”

“Wow, that is great and super speedy.”

“I want to thank you for your advice, care, and professionalism on our recent call. I felt supported and informed. Thank you for your expertise and personable nature through a stressful time.”

“I really appreciate your time and assistance. I felt heard and validated, thank you so much.”

interpersonal conflicts are complex, they take more time and support to resolve. Every query requires an individually nuanced response; some cannot be resolved on first contact. Our goal is always to empower members to actively resolve their issues by providing accurate information, clear action steps and, where needed, direct coaching through difficult conversations.

Legal Support

Our legal team represented members in 633 cases involving employers and professional bodies between 1 July 2025 and 30 June 2026. Workplace matters made up 85% of these cases, while the remaining 15% required representation at the Teaching Council.

“Thank you. The support of yourself and the team at NZEI is much appreciated. We only wish we had reached out sooner!”



Manaaki Tangata

Our Manaaki Tangata team embodies the whakatauki “*Anei au, tō pou whirinaki*” – *I am here, your pillar of support* – by supporting other members as they navigate professional challenges. This highly valued service is delivered by 34 dedicated members who draw on a wealth of experience, including several who have served in this role for more than 20 years. Over the past year, we referred 63 requests for member support to Manaaki Tangata.

Manaaki Tangata has also continued to strengthen its relationship with the Member Support Centre (MSC), building a shared commitment to manaakitanga in ways that uphold members’ mana and wellbeing. To support this work, the team engaged in regular professional learning and development, including regional hui, online wānanga, and specialised training focused on employment rights, psychosocial harm, and member support processes. Additional resources on our CoAssemble e-learning platform further supported their development.

Member Education

Developed over the last year, our new Foundational Skills Programme gives worksite representatives (WSRs) across the motu a shared foundation of theory and practical skills.

The programme features three full-day training sessions delivered through a blended learning approach. Through CoAssemble, WSRs can access online modules at their own pace to reinforce key concepts and deepen their understanding.

The programme is grounded in Mōku te Ao and guided by core principles including ako, whanaungatanga, and manaakitanga. It brings members together across sectors in kotahitanga, creating opportunities for WSRs to connect across the region, build ongoing networks, and grow the confidence needed to strengthen our union in workplaces and communities.

During this period, we delivered more than 20 Foundational Skills training sessions to WSRs, alongside bespoke training developed to support members, leaders, and WSRs during collective agreement negotiations.



We provide pastoral, industrial, and legal support, advice, and guidance to our members.



INVESTING IN OUR MEMBERS

Investing in our members: NZEI Te Riu Roa Scholarships

Each year, NZEI Te Riu Roa invests in the future of educators by awarding scholarships of up to \$6000 each to support staff and ECE kaiako members. Across 2025 and 2026, 13 dedicated professionals received this support, including six support staff and seven ECE teachers. Two of the ECE kaiako secured funding to continue a joint project started in 2024.

“ The scholarship has made such a difference for me and meant my dream is now finally a reality. ”

– Pala Fisher, 2025 Support Staff recipient

“ I am undertaking this project to support the early identification of the requirement for learning support to remove the current barriers to tamariki receiving the support they require. ”

– Charlene Meynell, 2026 ECE teacher recipient

Our recipients tackle important, real-world challenges. In 2025, scholarship recipients completed qualification pathways including a diploma in bilingual teaching, postgraduate psychology studies, and Montessori training, alongside practical initiatives like developing school transition practices for autistic children.

This year's cohort includes a support staff member embarking on a Bachelor of Counselling, and an ECE kaiako researching the accessibility of learning support for Pacific tamariki in Southland.

In 2026, Te Rōpū Takawaenga Māori o Aotearoa, the national association for Resource Teachers and Advisers – Māori (NARTAM), disbanded and set up a scholarship with its remaining funds to be administered by NZEI Te Riu Roa to support the learning of te reo Māori. The scholarship is to be launched at Hui ā Tau 2026.

“ I was incredibly grateful to be awarded an NZEI Te Riu Roa ECE and Support Staff Scholarship in 2025. The scholarship provided valuable financial support toward completing my Bachelor of Social Services, which I completed with Distinction. ”

– Bronwyn Gardner, 2026 Support Staff recipient

“ The scholarship support has been essential to my ability to undertake this journey. ”

– Charlene James-Meijer, 2025 recipient



Left: We support the careers of our members by awarding scholarships to fund their research, and to help them pursue a bachelor's degree or carry out initiatives that will benefit our tamariki.



OUR RAINBOW NETWORK



An incredible turnout from NZEI Te Riu Roa Rainbow Network members in Tāmaki Makaurau for the Big Gay Out 2026!



Our Rainbow Network

Small beginnings, creating safer spaces, aiming for a more inclusive union. While still developing, our Rainbow Network is taking steady steps forward across the motu.

In Tāmaki Makaurau, the network has been busy building our community through termly coffee hui and holiday social catch-ups. The network is humming, highlighted by a fantastic turnout at this year's Big Gay Out. It was a brilliant opportunity to support the Kimi Haeata petition, gathering more than 150 signatures from the rainbow community on the day.

The event also connected us with members who were unaware of the network, highlighting a clear need to boost our internal communications. Additionally, our convenors attended the CTU Out at Work conference in July, building valuable

relationships across the wider union movement and highlighting how we can better support our rainbow community.

In Te Whanganui-ā-Tara, current co-convenors Brooke Harper and John Manville are re-establishing the rōpū. Inspired by the CTU Out at Work Rainbow Voices conference in Auckland, they plan to grow the Wellington network by:

- using a messaging app to plan and communicate
- holding regular, scheduled social get-togethers
- holding a multi-union Rainbow Network event, and
- running an event on inclusive rainbow education, open to all NZEI Te Riu Roa members.



KIMI

HAEATA

BACK OUR

FUTURE



Delivering on our Kimi Haeata | Back our Future campaign

On 15 May 2026, members in Tāmaki Makaurau delivered the *Back our Future* | *Kimi Haeata* petition, signed by around 40,000 people, to the Minister of Education's electorate office on the North Shore.

While the delivery of the petition marks a significant milestone, the campaign continues, calling on all political parties

to commit to urgent investment in the education workforce across four key areas:

- A teacher aide in every classroom
- Fair pay and job security
- Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi
- Defending quality early childhood education

Right: NZEI Te Riu Roa members staged a rally outside the Minister of Education's electorate office before handing over the petition on 15 May 2026.



A teacher aide in every classroom

Rocking Parliament for public education

On 1 April 2026, the steps of Parliament were transformed into a high-energy concert venue as 75 talented students from Upper Hutt City's Birchville School ensured their message was heard loud and clear. Joined by a dash of percussion and a

backing band of younger siblings, parents, and grandparents, the students delivered an unforgettable performance of Queen's "We Will Rock You" and the modern classic "Baby Shark" on their recorders.

Organised by NZEI Te Riu Roa primary principal leader Robyn Brown, the mini-concert used the power of music to spotlight our core campaigns: securing a teacher aide in every classroom, upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensuring fair pay for educators, and defending quality early childhood education. It demonstrated that our campaign for the future of public education involves the whole community – and that our message cannot be ignored.



Left: Students from Upper Hutt City's Birchville School showed support for educators by holding a mini-concert with their recorders on the steps of Parliament.

Value educators fairly and ensure their work is secure



Mega strike

Our members were among the over 100,000 public sector staff who took part in a coordinated “mega strike” on 23 October 2025 to call on the government to better fund and resource public services. The country’s largest strike in 40 years brought together workers from multiple sectors, including more than 60,000 teachers, 40,000 nurses and salaried medical specialists, and 15,000 public service staff.

Above: Tens of thousands of teachers, health professionals, and other public sector workers took part in the mega strike to demand better pay and improved working conditions.



Kindergarten teacher and long-time NZEI Te Riu Roa member Louana Fruean braved gale force winds and torrential rain, which cancelled the 23 October mega strike in the capital, to protest alone at Parliament. Her message: “Pay us more. Pay us what we deserve. We’re teaching the future of Aotearoa, and the world.”

Taking the pay equity fight to the United Nations

In May 2026, we escalated the fight for pay equity by joining a coalition of affected workers and unions to lodge a formal complaint with the United Nations against the New Zealand Government. Submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the claim challenges the dismantling of pay equity progress last year. NZEI Te Riu Roa members Ally Kingi (Teacher Aide) and Mel Burgess (ECE teacher) are two of the four individuals taking their cases to the international stage alongside the Pay Equity Coalition Aotearoa, seeking global accountability for this direct assault on the rights of women workers.

Right: Kindergarten teacher and NZEI Te Riu Roa member Mel Burgess is one of four women who lodged a formal complaint with the United Nations against the New Zealand Government for scrapping 34 active pay equity claims in 2025.

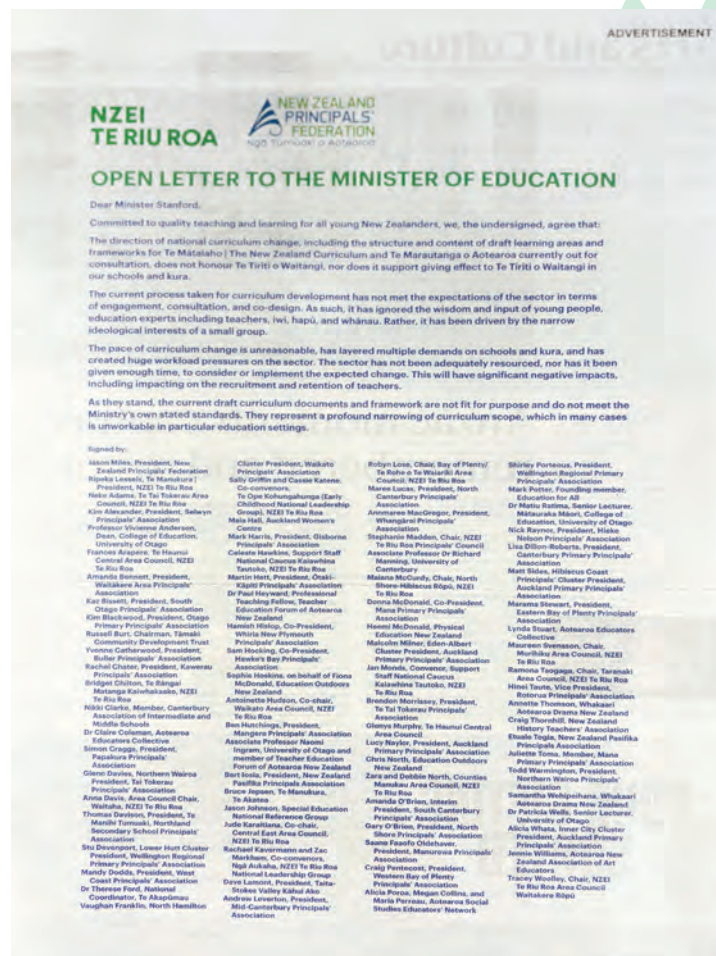


Left: Teacher Aide and NZEI Te Riu Roa national member leader Ally Kingi said that by involving the UN, complainants are seeking global accountability for what they describe as a direct assault on the rights of women workers in New Zealand.



Right: Front row (from left to right): Tamara Baddeley (E tū), Dame Judy McGregor (PECA), Prof Gail Pacheco (Human Rights Commission), and Muriel Tunoho (E tū). Back row (from left to right): Melissa Ansell-Bridges (NZCTU), Clare Preston (PPTA), Ally Kingi (NZEI Te Riu Roa), and Mel Burgess (NZEI Te Riu Roa)





An open letter, co-organised by NZEI Te Riu Roa and endorsed by a breadth of educators, peak bodies and subject associations, demanded that the Government pause the rollout of its rushed curriculum reforms.

Sector unity wins two-year delay in curriculum rollout

In a major win for the education sector, a sustained advocacy campaign led by NZEI Te Riu Roa forced the Minister of Education to push back the rushed curriculum implementation timeline. This significant shift directly followed an open letter co-organised by NZEI Te Riu Roa and published in major national newspapers in April 2026. The letter, signed by a diverse breadth of educators and national organisations, warned that the frantic pace and unworkable scope of the reforms threatened teaching quality and student learning. By mobilising this powerful coalition, the union successfully won a two-year delay, meaning the first mandated learning areas will now be deferred until 2029.

Holding the Teaching Council to account

NZEI Te Riu Roa held the Teaching Council to account by demanding it adhere to legal requirements and fill vacant elected teacher positions instead of allowing the body to become entirely dominated by ministerial appointees. Unfortunately, in July 2026, the System Reform Bill scrapped elected representatives altogether and moved teaching standards to the Ministry of Education. We condemned the fact that the country's 113,000 frontline teachers currently have zero representation on their own regulatory body despite entirely funding it through registration fees. Accountability

concerns intensified following a response to an OIA request by NZEI Te Riu Roa, which exposed text messages revealing a "cosy" relationship and potential conflict of interest between the Education Minister and then Teaching Council Chair David Ferguson regarding government funding for his private teacher training company. By challenging these governance failures and pushing back against the systemic changes in the proposed System Reform Bill, NZEI Te Riu Roa continues to fight for a transparent, fair public education system that remains independent of direct political influence.

Securing the \$1.4m asbestos clean-up grant

Following a campaign by NZEI Te Riu Roa, the Ministry of Education reversed its stance and approved a one-off grant totalling \$1.4 million to safely remove asbestos-contaminated sand from affected schools. We took immediate action after the Ministry initially told both schools and early childhood education centres (ECEs) to cover their own remediation costs, a directive that NZEI Te Riu Roa described as “a disgraceful failure of regulatory accountability.” President Ripeka Lessels wrote to the Education Minister in November 2025, warning that these massive, unforeseen expenses would cripple budgets and divert crucial funding away from student learning. While the final government grant unfortunately excluded ECEs, the union’s advocacy successfully shielded nearly 170 schools from financial hardship and highlighted the systemic regulatory failures affecting the wider sector.



Above: NZEI Te Riu Roa learning support specialists held a rally outside the Employment Court at the beginning of a four-day hearing in February 2026.

MOE learning support specialists mount Employment Court challenge

More than 700 Ministry of Education learning support specialist members of NZEI Te Riu Roa launched a legal challenge in the Employment Court against the Ministry’s retaliatory pay deductions. The Ministry slashed 10% of field staff and service managers’ wages during a month-long partial strike in 2025, despite members fulfilling their full contracted hours and refusing unpaid overtime. These specialists – including psychologists, therapists, and advisors – are stretched beyond capacity, navigating severe underfunding and a 116-day waiting list for vulnerable tamariki. NZEI Te Riu Roa members took a stand not only against the pay deduction but for the manageable workloads and resources the profession needs. By mounting the legal challenge, the union continues to defend both the dignity of educators and the future of quality learning support in Aotearoa.



Left: NZEI Te Riu Roa member leader Conor Fraser on TVNZ’s Breakfast programme on 10 February 2026, explaining how the partial strike action highlighted the urgent need for better tamariki support.

Fuel crisis response and transport allowance win

Through targeted advocacy, our union successfully secured the classification of schools and early childhood education centres (ECE) as “critical fuel users” under Phase 4 of the Government’s national fuel response plan. This designation is an important milestone, forcing the Government to recognise the essential role educators play in keeping society and the economy moving. However, ensuring priority access to fuel is only half the battle if high prices remain unaffordable for staff on the ground. To provide immediate financial relief to relief teachers during this cost-of-living crisis, NZEI Te Riu Roa has won a significant temporary increase to the Relief Teacher Transport Allowance, more than doubling the mileage rate from 37 cents to 83 cents per kilometre (after the first 10 kilometres daily). We continue to hold the Government to account, ensuring they back their expectations with the funding, job security, and essential worker status required to keep our schools and ECE services running.

NZEI Te Riu Roa demands immediate withdrawal of flawed Education System Reform Bill

NZEI Te Riu Roa submitted feedback to the Education and Workforce Select Committee in February 2026, strongly demanding the immediate withdrawal of the Education and Training (System Reform) Amendment Bill. President Ripeka Lessels warned that the legislation grants the Minister of Education sweeping, unchecked powers to unilaterally rewrite the curriculum and places the Teaching Council under total ministerial control by completely eliminating elected teacher representatives. We highlighted that shifting the Council’s statutory requirement from “have regard

to” to “give effect to” government policy effectively dismantles the regulatory body’s independence. Furthermore, National Secretary Stephanie Mills expressed deep concern over the erosion of educational equity, warning that prioritising bureaucratic oversight over equitable outcomes directly threatens initiatives designed to support Māori, Pasifika, and students with additional learning needs. We maintain that this undemocratic Bill – rushed through without sector consultation – must be reversed to prevent the deprofessionalisation of teaching.



Above: Veteran educator and long-time NZEI Te Riu Roa member Jo Patrick is staging a fortnightly musical protest outside the Education Minister’s electorate office, campaigning against fast-tracked education reforms until the 7 November General Election.



Left: NZEI Te Riu Roa President Ripeka Lessels and National Secretary Stephanie Mills made a submission to Parliament’s Education and Workforce Select Committee on 9 February 2026.

Uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi in education

Defending Te Tiriti in our schools

NZEI Te Riu Roa challenged the Government's removal of legal obligations for school boards to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi in an urgent Waitangi Tribunal inquiry. Following scathing Tribunal findings of Crown breaches, the union called for an immediate halt to legislation amending the Education and Training Act's Te Tiriti provisions. The union is also demanding a stop to the rollout of current curriculum reforms, which deprioritises te reo Māori, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori without proper sector consultation. Through these decisive actions, the union continues to fight to restore partnership, protect ākonga Māori educational outcomes, and hold the Crown accountable.

Below: At the start of the Waitangi Tribunal hearings, April 2026.



Court of Appeal challenge over RTLit and RTM de-funding

NZEI Te Riu Roa took the Crown to the Court of Appeal in May 2026, seeking a declaration that the Minister of Education failed to genuinely consult or meet her Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations when de-funding the Resource Teacher Literacy (RTLit) and Resource Teacher Māori (RTM) specialist services in Budget 2025. Backed by sector leaders and expert legal counsel, our union argued the case to uphold the mana of educators and send a clear message that fair process must be followed. The three-judge panel scrutinised the Crown's decision-making, asking searching questions regarding whether the Minister had properly sought advice on meeting her statutory Te

Tiriti obligations. While a judgment is expected to take several months, the legal action affirms our collective commitment to accountability and the success of ākonga Māori.

Left: National Secretary Stephanie Mills, NZEI Te Riu Roa President Ripeka Lessels, and National Executive member and former Resource Teacher Māori Tiri Bailey on Day one of the three-day Court of Appeal hearing, May 2026.



Defend quality early childhood education

Submission on the ECE Reform Amendment Bill

NZEI Te Riu Roa submitted feedback on the proposed Education and Training (Early Childhood Education Reform) Amendment Bill, strongly recommending that it be abandoned. We highlighted major concerns over a rushed legislative process that bypassed critical stakeholder consultation and resulted in a Regulatory Impact Statement that failed quality assurance. We warned that the proposed changes threaten to degrade teaching and learning quality while failing to address systemic issues like teacher shortages, crushing workloads, and unsafe ratios. Furthermore, we noted that the reforms pose severe risks to mokopuna Māori by forcing whānau to choose services that are no longer culturally affirming.





WHAT
WE
ACHIEVED
TOGETHER

Primary and area school teachers

A hard-fought primary teachers' collective agreement

The road to ratifying the Primary Teachers' Collective Agreement on 2 April 2026 was fraught with challenges. Our bargaining team – Barb Curran, Paeone Goonan, Liam Rutherford, Teena Cains and Oriwia Murray-Stevens – pushed hard for a fair offer. After members rejected the Government's third offer in December 2025, we entered mediated bargaining from 25-27 February 2026. This ended in an impasse, prompting NZEI Te Riu Roa to seek urgent facilitation. Members responded very strongly to a call for evidence about the impact of curriculum change. The bargaining team was able to share information from thousands of

teachers to illustrate the extent of the issues being experienced and the depth of feeling amongst teachers.

It was clear that the employer party felt the impact of the collective strength of teachers acting together. Not only did the massive October 23 mega-strike alongside nurses and PPTA colleagues result in an improved offer in December, but on 11 March 2026, the Public Service Commissioner took the unprecedented step of promulgating a new Individual Employment Agreement (IEA) to non-union members. The IEA resembled the rejected offer and failed to address our key concerns. We viewed this promulgation as a direct attempt by the Government to undermine our collective strength and divide teachers. In response, we pursued facilitation to secure a better offer and challenge the Government's decision to bypass our collective voice without any consultation.

During Employment Relations Authority (ERA) facilitation from 24-27 March 2026, we secured an improved offer, which members ratified on 2 April.

While primary teachers were in facilitation, our Area School Teachers, alongside the Post Primary Teachers' Association Te Wehengarua, entered mediation with the Ministry of Education on 24-25 March 2026. The resulting Ministry offer was put to a member vote closing on 24 April. While we did not achieve every goal, members voted to accept the proposed Terms of Settlement for the Area School Teachers' Collective Agreement, recognising it as the best outcome possible against a government actively hostile to our aspirations. The new 26-month collective agreement took effect on 25 March 2026 and expires on 24 May 2028.

Below: Waving signs at busy intersections during the morning rush hour, primary teachers nationwide held mini-rallies on 24 March 2026 as their bargaining team headed into facilitation.



Right: Primary teachers discuss strategies to strengthen collective bargaining leverage during the Paid Union Meetings in February 2026.



A major win: Pay parity with secondary teachers

We won an important principle about entrenching parity of unit value, which sets us up well for the future.

This means that if there are any changes made to the value of the base pay scale or units (this is a new feature of the Primary Teachers' Collective Agreement) for other teachers in the state sector (secondary or area school teachers), these changes must be offered to primary teachers within a month, regardless of whether or not we are bargaining or about to start bargaining.

In practice this means that if secondary teachers negotiate increases to the pay scale or units before our collective agreement expires, we will also be offered that increase. The secondary teachers' agreement expires well before ours does so we may be offered pay increases well before our expiry date, which is 2 October 2028.

ERA complaint over PSC breach of good faith

NZEI Te Riu Roa filed a complaint with the ERA against the Public Service Commissioner in June 2026. The complaint centres on the Commissioner's decision in March 2026 to promulgate a new Individual Employment Agreement for non-union primary teachers while collective bargaining was underway. We contend that this action undermined the integrity of the bargaining process and constituted a serious breach of good faith. Despite primary teachers successfully ratifying their collective agreement in April 2026, the legal challenge was pursued to protect our collective bargaining rights and hold the Commissioner accountable.

Impact of curriculum changes

To build our case for a better offer, worksite reps helped gather thousands of member stories regarding workload overload through a survey. Completed by nearly 7,800 teachers across more than 700 primary schools, these findings underscored the intense, unsustainable pressure facing educators across the country – which risks teacher burnout and threatens the learning outcomes of our tamariki:

- 87.5% of primary teachers reported an increased workload
- 83.2% of respondents feel overwhelmed by the pace and extent of change
- 77.6% of those surveyed believe the rollout is rushed and poorly managed
- 76.4% of teachers highlighted the need for more support for students with additional learning needs
- 49.6% of teachers reported increased behavioural and learning issues.

‘Rushed and unsustainable’: teachers say rapid change doesn’t serve pupils, could hasten burnout



Amy Ridout | The Post



PRIMARY TEACHERS



WHAT WE **ACHIEVED TOGETHER**

- Unit value parity
- \$2.5m fund for reliever release and PLD costs
- 4.6% pay increase within 12 months (2.5% in Year 1 + 2.1% in Year 2)
- Protected teacher autonomy over term breaks
- Pay parity with secondary teachers on the base scale and unit value
- 500 curriculum change release days per year for small schools (2027 – 2028)
- 25 more cultural leadership allowances
- Increase in camp allowance from \$25 to \$35
- Reliever transport allowance up from 37c to 83c/km

NZEI
TE RIU ROA



AREA SCHOOL TEACHERS



WHAT WE **ACHIEVED TOGETHER**

- 2.5% pay rise from 4 August 2026 (backdated to 25 March 2026)
- On 28 January 2027: 2.1% pay rise for teachers on steps 9-10; 2% increase for teachers on steps 1-8
- Up to 4.7% cumulative pay rise
- Increase to the value of management allowances and units
- LATs in training now get MITA/PBITA entitlements
- Professional Learning Development funds for relievers who are NZEI Te Riu Roa members
- 40 days of curriculum change release time for U1-U3 area schools to roll out changes
- No extra callback days, despite government pressure to change this.

NZEI
TE RIU ROA



WE ALSO **STOOD UP** FOR



- RTMs and RTLits, whose roles were disestablished last year
- Te Tiriti o Waitangi in education, taking our concerns to the Waitangi Tribunal

NZEI
TE RIU ROA

Primary and area school principals

Principals' Council: A strong voice in education

For over 30 years, the NZEI Te Riu Roa Principals' Council has provided a powerful voice for school leaders within our union and across the education sector, shaping national campaigns and strategic planning. This past year, the Council's support for our campaign against the government's

rushed curriculum changes – which kicked off with an open letter to the Minister of Education signed by more than 650 primary and area school principals and delivered to Parliament in October 2025 – helped secure a crucial win: a two-year delay on implementation timelines to 2029.



Above: The NZEI Te Riu Roa Principals' Council has provided a powerful voice for school leaders within our union and across the education sector for over 30 years.

Recognition of primary and area school principals' change management role

Primary principals ratified a collective agreement offer on 24 February 2026 that included a \$15,000 change management allowance, acknowledging the huge workload generated by the government's rushed curriculum changes.

NZEI Te Riu Roa area school principal members led the way by securing government recognition for their significant workload driven by NCEA curriculum changes – a key win ratified in their December 2025 collective agreement.

NZEI Te Riu Roa poll: Principals face burnout

An insights poll conducted by NZEI from 28 October to 5 November 2025 revealed that primary principals were at a breaking point, with 73% surveyed indicating they may quit within five years due to severe burnout. This potential exodus is driven by rapid, government-mandated curriculum changes implemented without adequate consultation.

Key findings include:

- 97% of primary principals consider the timeline for implementing the new curriculum changes unrealistic.
- 99% say the frequent policy and curriculum shifts have left insufficient time to consolidate previous changes.
- 99% report the pace of curriculum change has placed significant additional pressure on tumuaki and principals.
- 90% describe the professional learning and resources provided by the Ministry of Education to support implementation as insufficient.
- 96% confirm the cumulative effect of curriculum changes and increased workload has adversely impacted their health and wellbeing.
- 73% reveal they are likely to quit within the next five years due to the workload and wellbeing impacts of the curriculum changes.



Te Rā o Tumeke Tumuaki gaining momentum

Launched by NZEI Te Riu Roa in 2022, Te Rā o Tumeke Tumuaki continues to gain ground across schools and kura. The initiative achieved a major milestone on 23 July 2025 when the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association Te Wehengarua joined the celebrations. The annual day recognises and celebrates the leadership and outstanding contributions principals make to education.

Above: Three incredible days of learning, connection, and solidarity at our Rural and Teaching Principals' Conference, held in Tāmaki Makaurau from 27-29 May 2026. From exploring high-performance leadership and AI to navigating the shared challenges of rushed curriculum changes and the fuel crisis, our rural leaders showed inspiring resilience.



PRIMARY PRINCIPALS



WHAT WE **ACHIEVED TOGETHER**

- U-grade pay increase: 2.5% in Year 1 and 2.1% in Year 2
- Change management allowance
- Literacy and Numeracy leadership base increase: Up to \$10K by Year 3
- \$5K allowance for principal mentors
- \$4K PCT mentoring allowance for U1 and U2 principals
- Protected service when returning from charter schools
- Increased financial support to Chatham and Pitt Island tumuaki
- Unified pay system renewed across primary, area, and secondary principals

NZEI
TE RIU ROA



AREA SCHOOL PRINCIPALS



WHAT WE **ACHIEVED TOGETHER**

- U-Grade increase of 2.5% in 2025, plus an additional 2.1% in 2026
- NCEA change implementation allowance: \$6,000 per year, totalling \$15,000 over the 30-month term.
- A \$1,500 increase in career payments for beginning, experienced, and leading principals
- Increase in ASP payment of \$1,000 in 2026 and an additional \$500 in 2027
- A \$5,000 mentor allowance

NZEI
TE RIU ROA

Support Staff, Kaiārahi I te Reo and Therapists

Collective agreements ratified

In March 2026, essential support staff, kaiārahi i te reo, and therapists ratified their collective agreements. This milestone followed a significant escalation of member power, which grew from a 22,000-signature open letter in May 2025 to participation in October's "mega strike." Through this collective action, members successfully shifted the Government from initial offers that would have delivered a 0% increase for the majority of these essential professionals to securing the same offer as primary and secondary teachers. The bargaining teams also secured

better job security, targeted improvements for therapist leaders, and a new Professional Learning and Development (PLD) fund for those supporting neurodiverse students.

Following these negotiations, the Support Staff National Caucus Kaiawhina Tautoko (SSNCKT) continued to address systemic issues affecting the sector. Current priorities include campaigning against widespread job insecurity, advocating for a sustainable funding model for teacher aides, and supporting colleagues to understand their new collective agreement.



NZEI Te Riu Roa members delivered a 22,000-signature open letter to the Minister of Education's electorate office on the North Shore in May 2025.





SUPPORT STAFF IN SCHOOLS

WHAT WE **ACHIEVED TOGETHER**

- Won same % pay increase – 2.5% – as teachers
- Better job security with guaranteed hours for 12+ months
- Expanded tiaki allowance application
- Mileage reimbursement rate increased to 83c per km
- \$8m PLD fund for staff supporting neurodiverse students
- Medical certificates can now only be requested after 5 consecutive sick days (up from 3)
- New provisions to recognise workplace delegates
- Service protections if your school converts to a charter school
- Extended coverage to include all guidance counsellors without formal teacher training

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

KAIĀRAHI I TE REO AND THERAPISTS

WHAT WE **ACHIEVED TOGETHER**

- New \$4000 allowance for Therapist Team Leaders
- Pay rises: 2.5% increase from 24 March 2026 and a 2% increase from 23 March 2027.
- \$8m PLD fund for staff supporting neurodiverse students
- Mileage rate allowance raised from 62c to 83c per km
- Medical certificates can now only be requested after 5 consecutive sick days (up from 3)
- New provisions to recognise workplace delegates
- Lobbying to amend fixed-term agreements that exceed two years

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

Learning Support

Give back our 10 per cent!

Following a split verdict from the Employment Court over the Ministry of Education docking 10% pay from more than 700 of our MOE learning support specialist members taking partial strike action in 2025, we appealed to the Court of Appeal in July 2026.

These dedicated specialists, including psychologists, therapists, and advisors, took the stand to defend their professional dignity while already stretched by severe underfunding and a 116-day waiting list for vulnerable tamariki. By mounting this further legal challenge, our union continues to fight for the manageable workloads, resources, and fair treatment that the future of quality learning support in Aotearoa demands.

“Give back our 10%,”
NZEI Te Riu Roa learning support specialists chanted at a rally outside the Employment Court at the beginning of a four-day hearing in February 2026.



SENRG – MoE learning support national reference group

The Special Education National Reference Group (SENRG) brings together frontline Ministry of Education staff to advocate for critical learning support priorities including more specialist staff, better funding for children with additional needs, and stronger job security while contributing to wider union work. Members applied organising frameworks across three collective agreements to build engagement, grow membership, and progress national issues through regular engagement with senior Ministry leaders.

Settled in late 2025 and April 2026 within a constrained environment, the three Ministry of Education collective agreements saw members prioritise retaining core working conditions, taking strike action to achieve this goal. Key outcomes included:

- Hauora allowance: \$500 per annum for Service Managers and Support Workers; \$615 for Field Staff.
- Union lump sum payments: \$500 for Service Managers, \$400 for Field Staff, and \$250 for Support Workers. The variable amounts are linked to the terms for each of the three collective agreements.
- Salary increases: Variable pay increases and one-off payments, including up to 2.5% increase on some Field Staff salary steps (including half steps). One-off lump sums were secured for members on the top salary steps: \$800 for Support Workers and \$550 for Service Managers.
- Top-step salary increases: Field Staff top-step salaries rise to \$119,450. Service Managers rise to \$140,482 in 2026, increasing to \$141,887 in 2027.

Other wins included the Ministry providing all Support Workers with smartphones, capping the number of direct reports for Service Managers at six, and securing an additional day of professional learning and development (PLD) for Field Staff.

Ngā Aukaha

Ngā Aukaha – our diverse member leader group consisting of Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs), teacher aides, Speech-Language Therapists, classroom and specialist teachers, Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), Learning Support Coordinators, and Ministry advisors – organises to draw attention to learning support issues across the education system. By leveraging their frontline experience, the group successfully lobbies for change and directly connects high-level policy to on-the-ground impacts. Following the success of their second awareness day, Ngā Aukaha is focusing the 2026 campaign on mobilising votes for an inclusive education system for all tamariki in the 7 November General Election.

Standing up for high-quality Early Childhood Education



Since the last election, the National-led Coalition Government has relentlessly pursued a deregulation agenda in its reform of the early childhood education sector. This has included a regulatory review and a revision of the Early Childhood Education Licensing Criteria (the rules centres have to comply with to receive government funding and stay open), and, in late 2025, the launch of a sector funding review. It has also taken aim at the early childhood pay parity scheme – cutting pay parity requirements for relievers, and new and beginning early childhood teachers. However, at every step, kaiako and kaimahi have fought back – delivering open letters, signing petitions, making submissions, lobbying their MPs, holding action weeks, and getting whānau and community involved.

Members' wins!

Members' advocacy and action have led to a number of vital wins in 2025/26.

- ✓ Maintaining curriculum standards in the Early Childhood Education Licensing Criteria, which were due to be downgraded from 'compulsory' to 'guidance'.
- ✓ Safeguarding Te Whāriki, our world-leading early childhood education curriculum, after months of rumours about a private lobbying campaign to remove important Te Ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi elements and to change the curriculum's substance and intent.
- ✓ Retaining important health and safety elements of the ECE Licensing Criteria such as sleep checks every 5–10 minutes and having an adult toilet onsite.
- ✓ Winning a grant from Teacher Development Aotearoa for two years of funding for professional learning and development for kindergarten head teachers and early childhood education centre managers.
- ✓ Strong advocacy for high quality and due process, ultimately helping to push out the ECE Funding Review timeline, and preventing any downgrading of early childhood teacher qualification requirements.

Historic Early Childhood Education summit

Whakamana i te Ao Moko-puna, the ECE summit jointly organised with Kindergartens Aotearoa, successfully brought together parent representatives, kaiako, providers, and experts to consider future directions for early childhood education. Speakers highlighted the importance of Te Whāriki, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, public investment, and the value of not-for-profit and immersion settings. A key highlight was Abigail Boyd's eye-opening presentation on the Australian experience, which emphasised the importance of protecting and strengthening early childhood education through collective organising and advocacy.

Kōriporipo turns three!

The NZEI Te Riu Roa annual early childhood education workforce survey turned three last year – with another successful turnout of more than 2,000 respondents. It was also the second year of the parents and whānau survey, which had the highest turnout yet – almost 500 respondents. It was no surprise

that only 3% of parents and whānau felt the Government was taking the sector in a positive direction! It also showed the value parents place on health and safety, quality ratios, qualified teachers, pay parity, and affordable education.

Right: Australian Greens MP Abigail Boyd, who helped expose systemic abuse and cover-ups in the early childhood education sector, warned of the dangers of privatisation at the ECE summit.



Right: The kindergarten teachers' collective bargaining team: (from left to right) Adrian Batt, Claire Stevens, Michelle Maxwell, Jolene Barclay, Helen Smithies, Karen O'Keefe, Nadine Priebs, Virginia Oakly, and Nathan Pollock.



KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

WHAT WE ACHIEVED TOGETHER

- Pay parity with primary and secondary teachers
- 12 more cultural leadership allowances
- Head Teacher and Senior Teacher increases of \$4000
- Mileage increase to 83c per km
- Change process improvements including respect for maintaining teacher professional time as a genuine consultation area
- Improved worksite rep and union rights
- Relievers' service recognised from the beginning of employment
- Requirement to pay relievers once hours are agreed

Kindergarten members believe all early childhood kaiako deserve the same conditions and are calling on political parties to commit to pay parity for all!

**NZEI
TE RIU ROA**

Bargaining

As in the primary space, it's been a big year for bargaining with kindergarten teachers, kindergarten associations support staff, Te Kura ECE correspondence school, Evolve, Barnardos, KiNZ, Campus Creche, and ECECA members all renewing their collective agreements. The Kindergarten Teachers' Collective Agreement was signed on 29 June 2026.

Kindergarten teachers held Paid Union Meetings from 8-26 June 2026.



Te Kupenga Rangatahi

Ka Hao Te Kupenga 2026

Ka Hao Te Kupenga 2026 brought together rangatahi for two powerful days of kōrero and skill-building, transitioning to an online format after weather warnings forced the cancellation of the in-person hui.

On Friday, Te Manukura Ripeka Lessels and Korimako Tangiata Stephanie Mills grounded attendees in the whakapapa of NZEI Te Riu Roa, tracing the historic victories of collective action and outlining what remains at stake for the education sector. Member leaders then shared their own journeys, inspiring attendees and planting the seeds for them to grow their own ideas.

Below: Across the motu, Te Kupenga Rangatahi members are leading their own organising – taking initiative in decision-making, mobilising around the issues that matter to them, and bringing others along with them.



Serena Mata brought Mōku te Ao to life, moving it beyond policy into a tangible reflection of daily mahi. Attendees explored how ngā pou manifest in their classrooms and centres, while Maihi Parkinson and Jacob Phillips shared their personal journeys to demonstrate how new members can transition into meaningful leadership roles.

Monday shifted focus from purpose to practice. Attendees – ranging from those new to the union to those with a few years of experience – gained the practical knowledge, frameworks, and supported practice needed to build collective power at their worksites. Every participant left with a commitment to grow union engagement alongside their colleagues, backed by local support every step of the way.

Te Kupenga Rangatahi Network

Across the motu, Te Kupenga Rangatahi members are leading their own organising – taking initiative in decision-making, mobilising around the issues that matter to them, and bringing others along with them.

In Taranaki, member leaders Mattie-San O'Carroll and Jessica Graham have designed this year's engagement programme for the network, building initiatives they know will respond directly to the current needs of beginning teachers. Sessions covering social and emotional regulation, a classroom bus tour, and building a kete of digital tools all offer manaakitanga as educators start their careers. They also provide vital opportunities for whanaungatanga, building connections to Te Riu Roa and the power of collective action.

Meanwhile, Te Kupenga Rangatahi Area Council Convenors across Taranaki, Te Haunui, and the Central East are bringing together interested members each term to kōrero about critical issues, decide on collective action, and connect with educators across their rohe. Through this work, they are exercising genuine rangatiratanga within the wider NZEI Te Riu Roa structures and strengthening the regional network.

Professional work

Kōkirihiā

NZEI Te Riu Roa members continue to participate in the Kōkirihiā project, a Tokona te Raki (Kāi Tahu) initiative dedicated to ending streaming in schools. In February, Tokona te Raki released findings from 2022 and 2024 surveys conducted in partnership with NZEI Te Riu Roa, PPTA, and university partners. Completed by thousands of our members, the surveys show strong progress, with most primary respondents using or planning flexible, mixed-ability groupings. The insights also highlight the ongoing value of targeted literacy and maths support, alongside the need for more resourcing and professional learning and development (PLD) to sustain this momentum.

Waitangi Tribunal

NZEI Te Riu Roa stood alongside Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Hine and Te Kapotai in Wai 3553 – the Waitangi Tribunal’s urgent inquiry into the Education and Training Amendment Act and Te Mātaiaho. Over several intensive weeks, the Tribunal examined critical concerns regarding the removal of statutory Te Tiriti obligations, rapid curriculum changes, and the Government’s wider review of Treaty references in the Act. While evidence highlighted the serious risks these changes pose to mātauranga Māori, curriculum breadth, and Māori-Crown relationships, the inquiry showcased the power of collective action. Our work involves extensive collaboration with iwi, sector organisations, academics, and educators to uphold Te Tiriti commitments across schools and early learning settings.

The Waitangi Tribunal hearings, April 2026.

NZEI Te Riu Roa leads on legislative change

Our members actively shaped the sector’s response to legislative change by contributing to numerous written submissions and presenting orally at select committees. This advocacy covered key Ministry proposals and amendment bills – including regressive ECE changes, the proposed removal of NCEA, the Regulatory Standards Bill, and the System Reform Bill – alongside the sudden removal of school boards’ Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. While defending public education against these shifts tests our members’ resolve, our collective efforts have advanced the sector-wide call for an independent education body for curriculum and assessment free from political interference.

Curriculum change

Members have worked tirelessly to analyse draft curriculum changes covering all learning areas and levels for both English and Māori-medium settings. Our sector has been vocal that these drafts fail to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi or reflect progressive international models. Members have publicly commented on the drafts, given feedback, and discussed the implications with colleagues and whānau, all the while implementing the new English and Mathematics curricula in schools. This enormous effort has significantly impacted members’ capacity to attend to the broad scope of needs and issues in their kura and schools. A sustained advocacy campaign led by NZEI Te Riu Roa forced the Minister of Education to push back the rushed curriculum implementation timeline by two years to 2029.

Ngā Aukaha continues to advocate for inclusive education

Ngā Aukaha brings together a diverse network of frontline educators, specialists, and advisors to champion system-wide learning support issues. The group advocates for policy changes that create direct, positive impacts for ākonga. Building on the success of their 2025 Awareness Day, their 2026 campaign turns its focus toward voting for an inclusive education system in the 7 November General Election.

PHOTO: NAOMI MADEIROS





Above: NZEI Te Riu Roa members linked hands with other frontline workers to form a human chain from Newtown School to Wellington Regional Hospital to mark May Day 2026.

Below: NZEI Te Riu Roa, alongside four other unions, is seeking a formal declaration that the Equal Pay Amendment Act violates the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act by denying female-dominated workforces their right to freedom from discrimination.

Chain of solidarity

NZEI Te Riu Roa teachers and educators, alongside students and whānau, stood shoulder-to-shoulder with nurses and other frontline workers in a chain of solidarity to mark International Workers' Day on 1 May 2026.

"We stood in solidarity to celebrate workers and honour the legacy of those who fought for the rights we hold today," NZEI Te Riu Roa President Ripeka Lessels said. "Our current reality is that our hard-won rights are under attack by a government intent on dismantling worker protections."

Funding support for schools in India and Myanmar

NZEI Te Riu Roa has approved a further year of funding to support schools in India and Myanmar, providing vital education for around 1,300 children. Delivered through UnionAid, our \$20,000 contribution funds 16 night homework centres run by the Tamil Nadu Labour Union for Dalit and tribal communities.

These centres employ learning coaches who foster foundational skills in literacy, maths, and sciences, while actively encouraging girls to pursue higher education. The funding also sustains the Be Zine Community School in southeastern Myanmar, which serves 60 Karen ethnic minority children from kindergarten to Grade 4. This year, the school's core curriculum of languages, maths, and sciences will expand to include art and music.

As educators, we know this ongoing support provides life-changing opportunities for these children and represents an act of solidarity with our international colleagues who work tirelessly to protect the right to education for their ākongā.



National Pasifika Leaders' Report

Support for SAASIA

Sosaiete Aoga Amata Sāmoa i Aotearoa (SAASIA) requested a seat on the Early Childhood Advisory Committee (ECAC) but received no response. The NZEI Te Riu Roa National Pasifika Leaders Caucus wrote letters to the organisers and leadership of both organisations to offer our support. This collective advocacy successfully led to the inclusion of another Pasifika voice on ECAC and their attendance at the meetings in Wellington.

Increasing the visibility of Pasifika members within NZEI Te Riu Roa

Caroline and Etelagi presented at a Te Kahu Kiwi hui, sharing the history of Komiti Pasifika to date while looking ahead to the future. They emphasised that while Pasifika members must be visible within the structures of NZEI Te Riu Roa, the pathway forward needs to be carefully and strategically planned.



Over 300 members took part in the NZEI Te Riu Roa Pasifika Fono in April 2025, centered on the theme "Pasifika Rising: Navigating Our Moana".

National leadership groups, 2025–2026

Area Council Chairs

Zara Jackson
Debbie Riley
Maiana McCurdy
Lynda Stuart
Tracey Woolley
Kat Rayson
Anna Davis
Davida Marshall
Poly Haunui
Robyn Lose
Neke Adams
Glenda West
Maureen Svensson
Michelle Ryan
Antoinette Hudson
Frances Arapere
Glenys Murphy
Geena Fagan
Kathryne Tofia
Apriel Davies
Jude Karaitiana
Ramona Taogaga
Raewyn Kawana
Mark Potter

Principals' Council

Bastienne Kruger (Maria)
Stephen Lethbridge
Wendy Naidu
Richard Bennett
Andre Van Schalkwyk
Hiria Te Moana
Neil Towersey
Megan Marshall
Lisa Hill
Leiana Lambert
Hamish Fenemor
Robyn Brown
Justine McDonald
Stephanie Madden
Timothy Page
Heidi Hayward
Matt Tofia
Nathan Leith
Haydon Brill
Grant Burns
Phoebe Todd
Tom Wallis
Rob Naysmith
Maria Lyne
Seletute Mila (Tute)
Mark Whitford
Tracy Fraser
Takarihi Temarama
Martyn Weatherill

Special Education National Reference Group

Julieanne Hoetjes
Beth Melster
Kaye Hyams
Jason Johnson
Renei Johnson
Liz Tomlinson
Te Aroha Hiko
Conor Fraser
Mark Appleyard
Shanley Gamble

Te Rāngai Mātanga Kaiwhakaako

Juliette Ridge
James Hobby
Louise Robertson
Kamrul Jalil
Nera Hicks
Rachel Johnson
Tangihia Pouwhare
Luciana Stachell
Beverly (Oriwia) Murray-Stevens
Angela Breen
Donna Moses Heeney
Harriet (Ubby) Williams-Fonohema
Lois Rushton
Angela Graham
Jennifer Neill
Sarah Coup
Bridget Chilton
Nic Hale
Lauren Colyer
Barbara Curran
Virginia Heta
Lovi (Erena) Collier

Te Ope Kōhungahunga

Sally Griffin
Imogen Held
Lynette Fillery
Nadine Priebs
Paula Baird
Gloria Sun
Moana Paterson
Marama (Lisa) McRobert
Penina Ria
Helen Smithies
Cassie Katene (CO-CHAIR)
Hannah Pilcher
Mel Burgess
Michelle Louise Dons
Erica Williams
Adrian Batt
Nathan Pollock
Sheena Dalwood
Amanda Reedy
Zane McCarthy

The Support Staff National Caucus Kaiawhina Tautoko

Sarah Jane Garner
Sheryl Riceman
Melody Faitala
Franchelle Schofield
Kerri Beuth
Rai Brothers
Te Rau o Te Aroha (Kayla)
Victor Mercep
Jan Monds
Violet Smith
Claire Southee
Susan Kauika
Megan Cooper
Josephine Westley
Holly van der Kley
Vicky Weir
Tracey Clifton
Jane Salesa
Ally Kemplen
Wayne Goodley
Annie Te Moana

Ngā Aukaha

Justine Blankenstein
Chrissy Gardner
Susan Underwood
Joanne van den Heuvel (Jo Patrick)
Candice Etzine
Wikitoria Maguire
Merepaea Heta
Isabella Pomare
Zac Markham
Aaron Frost
Stephen Robinson
Monique Jansonius-Albers
Evelyn Perry
Lisa Prior
Alicia Bravo
Rachel Kavermann
Jenny Albrecht
Waiinu Wanakore
Tiri Bailey

Sustainability Report

Climate change poses significant risks to Aotearoa New Zealand's environment, communities, and future generations. Committed to kaitiakitanga (guardianship), NZEI Te Riu Roa recognises its responsibility to reduce its environmental impact and help build a more sustainable future.

Our long-term strategy focuses on reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from operations while continuing to support members across the motu. Progress is measured against our 2019 baseline.

Our emissions reduction targets

By 2029-30, NZEI Te Riu Roa aims to reduce:

- fuel and electricity emissions by 50% (from 2019 levels)
- air travel emissions by 25% (from 2019 levels)

By 2049-50, we aim to achieve:

- net zero carbon emissions from fuel and electricity.

To support our transition, we continue to offset remaining operational emissions annually to maintain carbon neutrality.

GHG emissions for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 were independently verified by McHugh & Shaw.

2025-26 performance

NZEI Te Riu Roa made strong progress towards its emissions reduction targets during the year ended 31 March 2026.

Scope	Emission category	tCO ₂ e			
		2025-26 Verified	2024-25 Verified	2023-24 Verified	2019 Base year
Scope 1	Direct GHG emissions	84	87	88	135
Scope 2	Indirect GHG emissions from imported energy	14	20	16	28
Scope 3	Indirect GHG emissions from transportation & distribution	239	234	457	471
	Indirect GHG emissions from products & services used by the organisation	38	68	73	84
	Total	375	409	634	718

Total gross GHG emissions for 2025-26 were 374.83 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent. This represents:

- an 8.5% reduction compared with 2024-25, and
- a 48% reduction compared with our 2019 baseline.

Emissions profile

Scope 1 (22.5%) – direct emissions from transport fuels used in leased vehicles.

Scope 2 (3.8%) – indirect emissions from purchased electricity.

Scope 3 (73.7%) – indirect emissions from operational activities, including:

- air travel (48.2%)
- well to tank – air travel (8.2%)
- well to tank – transport fuel (5.8%)
- accommodation (5.1%)
- landfill waste (4%)
- taxis/ubers (0.8%)
- rental cars (0.6%)
- with private vehicles, electricity line losses, well to tank – rental cars, and ferries/buses combined (1.0%).

Scope 3 accounts for emission sources from NZEI Te Riu Roa nationally, excluding GHG emissions from branches, aronui tōmua, komiti pasifika, and area councils.

As NZEI Te Riu Roa continues to evolve its operations, we remain committed to improving energy efficiency, reducing travel-related emissions where practicable, and embedding sustainable practices across the organisation.

FINANCE OVERVIEW

2025-26



Kanohi ki te kanohi, rae ki te rae

Face to face, forehead to forehead. This is how we stand up for ourselves and the tamariki we educate. As the whakatauki from last year's annual conference reminds us, we are strong when we come together, face to face, and ensure we're informed, aligned, and that we have each other's backs. Then, together, we go forehead to forehead with those who stand in the way of what's best for our mokopuna, ourselves, our education system, our future.

