

## Cultural Celebration Award Entrant: Ministry of Education

Video Link: <https://vimeo.com/141144893>

### Waitangi 175 – our past, our present, our future

The Ministry of Education is the lead advisor to the Government on education, including early childhood education, primary and secondary schooling and tertiary education.

The Ministry acts as the steward of the education system, supporting families, whanau, iwi and communities, and the education system as a whole, to focus on lifting aspiration and raising educational achievement for every New Zealander.

The Ministry is also responsible for how the education system reflects and fulfils its responsibilities under the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty of Waitangi is fundamental to the Ministry's operation and underpins every decision the Ministry makes. The aim is for the identity, language and culture of Maori to inform the development and design of policy, strategy and resources. They also expect their staff to be informed and innovative about considering the Treaty of Waitangi in business matters.

In recognition that this year marks the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Treaty, the Ministry's vision is to give expression to the Treaty's fundamental importance and for all staff to better recognise and celebrate New Zealand's cultural background through a range of events and activities across the country and throughout the year.

"This year is a great time to make the most of opportunities to learn more about the Treaty and its relationship to the work we do and the way we do it," says the Secretary for Education, Peter Hughes.

"Our ancestors were optimistic, hugely capable and resilient, with a good dose of Kiwi grit. I reckon that's a pretty good recipe for success – and it's a recipe still relevant today".

Staff have shown much interest in this initiative, raising their day to day engagement with the Treaty by pausing to reflect on how the Treaty applies to them and their work, as well as actively seeking more information on how the Treaty shapes New Zealand and the Ministry's past, present and future.

Staff were invited to be part of a "working-bee" to feed back into the Steering Group on how to implement Waitangi 175. The idea of providing commemorative plaques to new schools originated from a staff member who felt that this was a good way to engage with the sector and promote Waitangi 175. Seeing their ideas implemented gave staff confidence in the value of their input and increased engagement with the initiative as a whole.

The Treaty of Waitangi has also been integrated into existing work programmes, such as the Maori histories project that aims to strengthen the teaching of Maori history in schools and Ministry of Education community out-reach activities.

The challenge is sometimes how to make the Treaty relevant to schools and education. For example, teachers and leaders from Prebbleton School emphasised the need for the Treaty to be made “actually relevant”. Prebbleton School teacher Jo Schumacher shares these concerns.

“Things need to become more natural, so we’re not so posed and it’s not token; it’s just incorporated and flows through everything. We’re all kind of not sure how to move forward. I think most people want to, but just not sure what the first step is”.

The Waitangi 175 website [www.waitangi.tki.org.nz](http://www.waitangi.tki.org.nz) has been put together to address such a desire to make the Treaty relevant. It enables schools and early learning centres to share stories, ideas and resources on what they are doing to commemorate the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Waitangi 175 has been well received by the education sector, with schools taking up new initiatives with enthusiasm. Bruce Topham, Principal at Halswell School in Christchurch says: “Being involved in building a new school...has been an absorbing experience...At Halswell we have used this opportunity to reconnect with our local history and as a consequence each of the new blocks has been named using local Maori place names...The fact that the new school will open 175 years on from the signing of our founding document is able to be acknowledged with a special planting and the erecting of the commemorative plaque adds additional significance to the event”.

In addition to schools, the website targets educators, leaders, parents, iwi and the general public, helping parents to find information aimed at supporting their child’s identity, language and culture at school, and encouraging general public participation in regional activity throughout the year.

An example of a story shared on the website is from the Kings Theatre Creative, entitled ‘Te Tiriti – The Treaty, A bicultural conversation’. They invited the Northland community to participate in commemorating Waitangi through an art exhibition for ‘provoking thought as to the future of New Zealand- Aotearoa and the partnership created by signing the Treaty of Waitangi. Our past – Our future – Our people.’

Whilst the Waitangi 175 initiative is specific to the Ministry and education sector, the Ministry are also working in a cross government working group, co-ordinated by the Ministry for Culture and Heritage.

The Ministry is proud to have played, and continue to play, a lead and influencing role in driving cross-government engagement and this collaboration is seen as one of the biggest wins of Waitangi 175 so far.