

**CONFIRMED**

**NEW SCHOOL ASSURANCE REVIEW REPORT**  
**Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery**

Location: Christchurch

Ministry of Education profile number: 683

# **New School Assurance Review Report Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery**

## **Introduction**

A New School Assurance Review is a review of particular areas of school performance and is undertaken to specific terms of reference.

New School Assurance Reviews are generally undertaken within the first year of the school's opening.

## **Terms of Reference**

This review is based on an evaluation of the performance of Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery School. The terms of reference for the review are to provide assurance:

- that the school is operating in accordance with the vision articulated by the board of trustees
- to the elected board and community that the school is well placed to provide for students.

## **Context**

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery School is a special character state integrated school. It is the result of the merger of two schools, Discovery 1, a Years 1 to 8 school and Unlimited Paenga Tawhiti, a secondary school, to create a new composite school in 2014. Both inner city schools lost the use of their facilities during the 2011 Christchurch earthquakes. Being positioned on one site, in the city, is a large aspect of the special character of the school.

Since the merger, Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery School has operated on two separate sites some distance apart. Both sites are leased, one on an annual basis. One part of the school is operating in a semi-rural setting and the other at the University of Canterbury. The school has had several moves during this time.

Both schools' communities welcomed the merger. They had many fundamental beliefs in common, including strong commitment to the active role of parents and students in education. While this provided a good basis from which to build, the schools had some very different ways of thinking and implementing their core beliefs.

A Readiness to Open Report commissioned by the Ministry of Education (MoE) showed that work to ensure the school was ready to operate as a new school, while being managed well, had been challenging. Development of a new special character, a joint vision and building new school facilities were areas for development.

## **Background**

Ao Tawhiti Unlimited Discovery School provides for students from Years 1 to 15. The roll has decreased, with 452 students currently enrolled. These students reflect diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, learning needs and abilities.

The school has moved from a Ministry of Education appointed establishment board to a parent elected board. Trustees work collaboratively with the school's director. A new senior leadership

team and community of learners structure is in place. Systems and processes important to the running of a new school have been prioritised and developed. A collaborative process is being undertaken to develop a seamless Year 1 to 13 curriculum.

The board's vision is strongly based on students directing their own learning. A significant feature of the school is the equal relationship between students, teachers and other adults. Extended family-like relationships with parents, whānau and members of the wider community enable and enhance students' learning. They are heavily involved in school life and curriculum delivery.

The length of time that the school has been in make-shift leased premises, is making decisions about the use of the school's resources difficult. Forward planning is becoming increasingly frustrating for the board and director and school community as uncertainty about facilities is impacting on the school's ability to:

- plan in a strategic, considered and prudent manner
- provide consistency and continuity of learning as students move through the school
- enable enough suitable spaces to support students' learning and wellbeing
- maintain levels of optimism amongst staff, students and the parent community about the future of the school
- truly embrace the special character 'one school' intent signified by the merger.

There is an urgent need for the Ministry of Education to provide greater clarity and confirmed timelines about the future placement of the school so trustees can plan effectively.

During the on-site stage of this review, students and staff were being relocated from their modern learning environment to another building as the lease had expired.

## **Findings**

Students are at the centre of teaching and learning. Personalised planning enables them to follow their passions, interests, needs and strengths. They take the lead in directing their learning. This is well supported by the:

- high value placed on students' ideas and opinions
- many opportunities for 'real life, hands on' learning
- board's commitment to ensuring students have very good, equitable access to digital technology.

Student learning is regularly shared and celebrated with the school community.

Interactions between students and staff are supportive and respectful. Student choice is the basis for these relationships and decision making. Teachers have a 'can do' attitude in assisting students to follow their goals. Students of varying ages and abilities are welcomed in classes that reflect their interests and learning goals.

Senior leaders have established useful systems to monitor curriculum coverage. Processes to help develop students' self-management skills are in place. In younger classes there is a strong emphasis on supporting students to understand themselves as a learner.

Māori values are well reflected in the school's values and special character. Tuakana teina and ako are evident in the way students interact. The establishment of a whānau group is an appropriate step towards increased cultural responsiveness.

The director has prioritised the development of school-wide systems to effectively manage information about students' learning and wellbeing. Students' progress and achievement towards set goals is tracked and monitored, as is attendance. Goal setting for students is a regular, collaborative and ongoing, reflective process. Teachers, students and parents have good access to this learning information.

Senior leaders have recently adapted the school timetable to enable students to make the most of personalised mentoring opportunities. It is too early to tell the effectiveness of this process. Developing indicators of success will help staff to evaluate the outcome of the mentoring programme.

Considerable emphasis is being placed on strengthening assessment practices. National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) results are improving. While respecting student choice, learning conversations are increasingly focused on encouraging students to set achievement goals.

Teachers in Years 1 to 8 use a good range of assessment tools and techniques. They are exploring approaches that support effective moderation of teachers' National Standards judgements. Some interventions to raise student achievement are particularly effective, for example junior school writing for targeted students. Ensuring students have good literacy and mathematics skills, so they are more able to follow their dreams and passions, is highlighted in the Years 4 to 6 learning community.

The board has a clear vision for the special character of the school. Trustees' commitment to this can be seen in the agreed criteria they use for decision making.

Trustees are taking a careful, considered and strategic approach to school governance. The board actively seeks and responds to the school community's views and feedback. It is effectively setting priorities towards a one school culture, and making good progress, within the restrictions of its current circumstances.

Professional learning and development has appropriately supported the development of senior school leaders in their new roles. This is now extending to middle management. School-wide professional learning is contributing to:

- increasing shared understanding of the school's special character within a merged school environment
- challenging thinking about the provision of an innovative curriculum
- considering what a personalised learner profile might look like as students' journey through the school.

Staff value senior leaders' openness to new ideas. While struggling with the ongoing nature of temporary facilities and the stress this places on some, they appreciate the approachability and flexibility of senior leaders in the provision of learning opportunities for students.

Key agreed next steps for the school are to:

- increase the consistency of the newly introduced teachers' appraisal system and extend appraisal to include leadership roles
- develop action plans, with set timeframes, for curriculum development and policy review
- increase the evaluative component in school reviews
- continue to strengthen Te ao Māori and culturally responsive practices, particularly in the development of the school's localised curriculum
- make further links between the charter's strategic goals and annual aims
- be more specific when setting annual student achievement targets
- provide increased student choice and decision making in the afternoon programme for some younger students.

### **Board assurance on legal requirements**

Before the review, the board and principal of the school completed the *ERO Board Assurance Statement and Self-Audit Checklists*. In these documents they attested that they had taken all reasonable steps to meet their legislative obligations related to:

- school management and reporting
- curriculum
- management of health, safety and welfare
- personnel management
- financial management
- asset management.

During the review, ERO checked the following items because they have a potentially high impact on students' achievement:

- emotional safety of students (including prevention of bullying and sexual harassment)
- physical safety of students
- teacher registration
- processes for appointing staff
- stand-downs, suspensions, expulsions and exclusions
- attendance.

The school has attested that it is unsure about aspects relating to Health, Safety and Welfare and Personnel. The board is seeking to address this through policy review.

The board has developed a useful charter and strategic and annual plans. These documents centred on expectations to be actively building new facilities that better support its special character. As the MOE has not yet been able to acquire a suitable site, the board believes its documents need further review. The level of uncertainty makes this process challenging. For this reason the board had not submitted these key documents to the MOE by the on-site date stage of this review. These documents have now been submitted.

### **Conclusion**

The board and director have made good progress towards developing a merged composite school learning framework and culture. The structure of the school has been established with clarity around roles and responsibilities. Many new and useful systems have been developed to support students' learning and wellbeing.

ERO has confidence in the board and director to further develop the school within its special character. ERO recommends that some finite decisions are made, or timelines formally reviewed, by the Ministry of Education to better enable the board and director to carry out their responsibilities to the school and its community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Patterson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lesley Patterson  
Deputy Chief Review Officer  
Southern Region

## About the School

Location	Christchurch	
Ministry of Education profile number	683	
School type	Composite (Years 1 to 15)	
School roll	452	
Gender composition	Boys 52%; Girls 48%	
Ethnic composition	Māori	13%
	Pākehā	83%
	Asian	2%
	Pacific	1%
	Other ethnicities	1%
Review team on site	April 2016	
Date of this report	14 June 2016	