

27 November 2025

Hon. Erica Stanford
Minister of Education
Freepost Parliament
WELLINGTON 6140

Email: erica.stanford@parliament.govt.nz

Dear Minister

Kei te rangatira, tēnā koe

Secondary Principals' Council of Aotearoa (SPC) wishes to express our strong opposition to your government's decision to remove the requirement for school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi within the Education and Training Act 2020.

SPC champions public education that meets the needs of our rangatahi. We support the growth of a culturally responsive secondary education system that promotes and enhances Māori success as Māori. Schools should be places where ākonga Māori and their whānau feel a sense of belonging and connection. We add our voices to the many and publicly commit to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi in our schools.

We support the important role of the board in governing a school, and its role in ensuring that the school gives effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We consider that the absence of a specific Te Tiriti provision in the proposed amendment to the Bill is unacceptable and is a breach of the Crown's obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

We do not agree that Boards have lost focus on their core responsibilities: they continue to be focused on achievement, attendance, keeping young people safe at school and ensuring they are learning. This is our daily work, which we do in partnership with our diverse communities.

Our principal members work hard with their Boards to ensure schools' plans, policies, and curricula reflect local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori and te ao Māori, and take reasonable steps to make instruction in tikanga Māori and te reo Māori available. We do this because we know that our Māori students (25% of the 2023 population) need to see themselves reflected in the education they are receiving and the aims and expectations of their country's education system. Honouring Te Tiriti ensures every child feels valued, respected and represented in their learning.

The removal of the explicit obligation to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi sends a damaging message to our students, our staff, and our communities that the principles of partnership, participation, and protection are negotiable, variable and able to be avoided. Voluntary commitments alone cannot guarantee equity. Legislation matters because it sets expectations, protects progress, and ensures every board in Aotearoa New Zealand holds the same responsibility to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

SPC principals will continue to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi in governance, curriculum, leadership, and community partnership as an unchanged moral and professional obligation.

We urge you to consider this feedback which is widely held and deeply felt, to reflect, review and reverse the decision to remove the requirement for school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi from the Education and Training Act.

Reaffirming the Crown's commitment to Te Tiriti as an essential foundation of a high-quality, inclusive, and successful education system for all in Aotearoa, is critical.

We stand in solidarity with the wider education sector in opposing this change. As always, we are happy to meet with you and continue dialogue about these matters and hope you too will see the value of a partnership approach.

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kate Gainsford', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kate Gainsford
Chair, Secondary Principals' Council of Aotearoa