

# Participating in What Matters to Me

## **Our position:**

Every mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand has the right to have their voices heard about things that affect them and to fully participate in society using methods and platforms that are safe, meaningful, and accessible to them. By supporting their participation in things like education, the environment, culture, and recreation, we empower them to shape their futures and our communities.

## **What do we mean by participating in what matters to me?**

Participating in what matters to mokopuna means creating environments where the voices of all mokopuna are valued, and they are encouraged to engage in activities that are meaningful to them, with real opportunities to participate in what they say matters using methods that are safe, meaningful and accessible to them. It includes ensuring access to quality inclusive, equitable education, enabling participation in environmental conservation and climate action where they want to, promoting cultural identity and participating in cultural activities and learning, and providing equitable opportunities for play, recreation, and sports. It also involves supporting meaningful mokopuna participation in decisions that will impact them and advocating for their own rights to be respected, protected, and fulfilled.

Mokopuna should feel empowered to influence decisions that affect them, and our systems and processes should support their participation. They should be provided with the platforms and resources to actively engage in educational, environmental, cultural, and recreational activities - these are the things that mokopuna have told us they really want to participate in. Participation in these areas helps them develop skills, build confidence, and contribute positively to society.

## **Why does participating in what matters to me matter for mokopuna?**

Mokopuna tell us that having a say in what affects them and engaging in activities they care about is crucial for their development and happiness. This is also their right under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. When mokopuna can participate in meaningful ways on the things that affect them, they are more likely to feel connected, valued, and confident.

Mokopuna have also told us about some of the things that they really want to be supported to participate in, on a day-to-day basis.

Engagement in education enhances learning outcomes and fosters a love for learning. Participation in environmental initiatives and climate action can give the opportunity to highlight responsibility and kaitiakitanga for Papatūānuku and te taiao, as well as a recognition of Aotearoa New Zealand's place in the world as a Pacific nation. Cultural activities strengthen identity and community ties, while recreational activities promote physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Participating in decisions empowers mokopuna to take an active role and contribute to societal change. After all, the decisions that are made today at governmental levels, by businesses and in communities directly affect mokopuna both today and into the future, on an intergenerational basis. It is only right that they should have a say in these decisions using methods and platforms that are effective, safe, and meaningful for them.

Inclusive and supportive environments that value the voices of children and youth help nurture inherent strengths and enable them to develop strong identities and self-esteem.

### **How do we know when mokopuna are participating in what matters to them?**

We will know mokopuna are actively participating in what matters to them when:

- They have opportunities to have a say in decisions affecting them that are made by the Government, local government, businesses and communities.
- They have access to quality inclusive and responsive education and can influence educational policies that affect them.
- They are engaged in environmental conservation, climate action and sustainability initiatives and decision-making at the national, regional and local levels where they want to be.
- Cultural activities and heritage are actively celebrated and preserved.
- They have opportunities to participate in play, recreational activities and sports, promoting their overall wellbeing.
- They are involved in advocacy activities, and valued for the part they play in defending their own human rights.
- Mokopuna can participate in what matters to them using methods and platforms that are safe, meaningful, and accessible to them.

## **Why does participating in what matters to me matter for Aotearoa?**

Every mokopuna has the right to be heard and to participate fully in society, as made clear by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Ensuring that children and youth can engage in activities that matter to them is essential for a vibrant and inclusive society, and strengthens Aotearoa New Zealand and our global society on an intergenerational basis.

When children are empowered to participate in what matters to them, including by having a say on the things that affect them, they are able to influence decision-making that impacts on their lives, and reflect their learnings in a constructive way for the benefit of our society. This leads to stronger communities, better educational outcomes, positive intergenerational shifts, and a more inclusive society. Supporting their interests and participation also contributes to economic growth and social cohesion.

Inclusive participation fosters innovation and creativity, driving societal progress. When mokopuna are actively engaged in their shaping their education, environment, and cultural activities, they bring fresh perspectives and ideas. This enhances their overall quality of life and helps to ensure that the needs and aspirations of future generations are met.

## **What should we do?**

Let's commit to and invest in the participation of mokopuna. This means we are all creating a society where their voices are heard and valued, and they are able to participate in the things that matter to them. This benefits all of us. Schools are always places of inspiration and innovation where all mokopuna are included, communities become more resilient and connected, our society becomes richer with diverse perspectives, cultures and talents, and our environment can be protected for the health and wellbeing of current and future generations.

## GLOSSARY

The explanations below are provided to support readers of this position statement, they are not intended to be interpreted as definitions.

Aotearoa	Term in Māori often adopted as a name for New Zealand
Kaitiakitanga	Guardianship
Kupu	To talk, to speak, word
Mokopuna	When we use the kupu 'mokopuna' in our work, we are referring to all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand
Papatūānuku	In the Māori world view, land gives birth to all things, including humankind, and provides the physical and spiritual basis for life. Papatūānuku, the land, is a powerful mother earth figure who gives many blessings to her children
Te taiao	The natural world that contains and surrounds us — the land, water, climate and living beings. It refers to the interconnection of people and nature
Te Tiriti o Waitangi or Te Tiriti	The founding legal document of Aotearoa New Zealand, signed in 1840