

Principal in Person, with Alan McIntyre, Owhiroa Primary School



By Phil Taylor

How long have you been an educator, and where did you train?

Since training at Hamilton Teachers College, School of Education at Waikato University, I've dedicated more than five decades to education. During that time, I've had the privilege of being in various teaching and principal roles, and for the past 35 years I've proudly led Owhiroa Primary School. Over the decades, I've taught countless students, mentored teachers and led major school initiatives. For me, education has never been a job, it's a lifelong vocation that gives me the opportunity to make a positive difference in people's lives every day. Looking back now, it's amazing to think how many classrooms, staffrooms and assemblies I've stood in and how many young people I've had the privilege of seeing grow and thrive.



Alan McIntyre, the respected longtime Principal of Owhiroa Primary School.

When did you become Principal of Owhiroa Primary?

I was appointed as Principal of Owhiroa Primary School in 1990. I've proudly served this community for 35 years. During my tenure, I've seen the school transform in scale and character, from a small local school of 200 students, into one of the most sought-after and respected primary schools in Auckland. Our roll has grown to around 850 students, supported by 74 dedicated staff members and our facilities have expanded to keep pace with that growth. A recent milestone was the opening of our 18-classroom block, which the board of trustees named The Alan McIntyre Centre in my honour.

That recognition was incredibly humbling and stands as a reminder of the students and families I've been fortunate to serve so far and the generations of children and families that building will serve in years to come. The school has developed into a leading educational institution with a positive reputation both nationally and internationally. Watching the growth of Owhiroa Primary School into such a trusted name in primary education has been one of the most rewarding achievements of my career.

What's the best thing about being an educator and Principal?

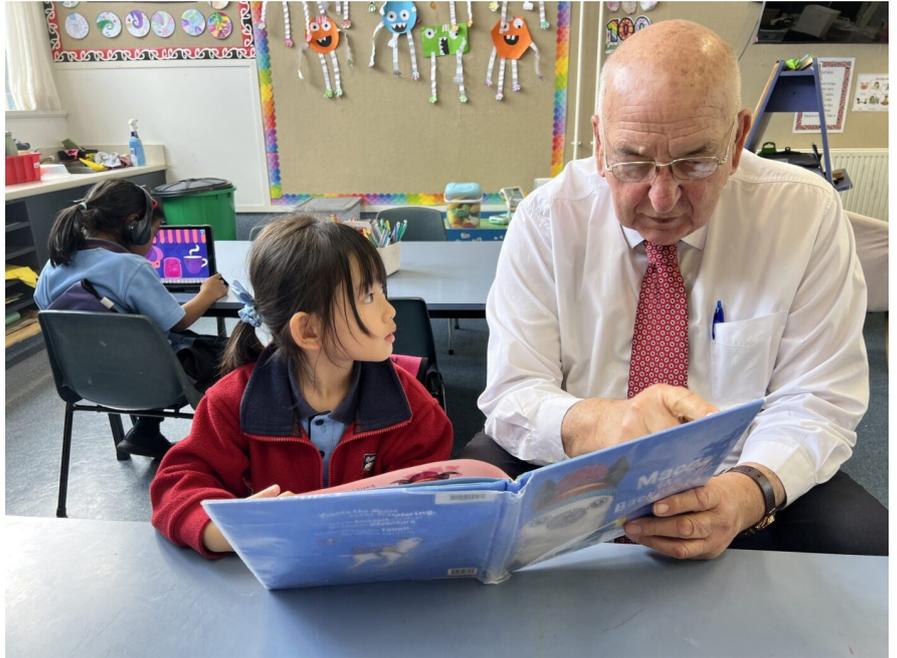
For me, the greatest joy of being both an educator and a principal lies in the students, teachers and families. There's nothing more rewarding than seeing a child light up with excitement when they feel seen, safe and inspired to learn. At Owhiroa Primary School, I make it a personal mission to ensure every child knows they are valued, whether that's through a birthday card for each student, a personal visit to a family in need, or even dropping by with a light-hearted 'Dr McIntyre Medical Room prescription' of chocolates when a student is recovering from an injury. These gestures may seem small, but they build trust, connection and belonging.

Beyond the students, it's about empowering staff, engaging families and building a school community that truly feels like a family. A big part of my personal philosophy is to challenge the status quo and having the courage to think differently, embrace innovation and seek the best outcomes. Great leadership is about respecting the traditions of the past while constantly looking ahead to create innovative ways that inspire young minds for the future.

I keep a quote by Gertrude Stein on my computer that says: "Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone." Gratitude is something I practice daily. I believe in recognising the good around us, expressing appreciation and making the effort to thank people. It's the small acts of acknowledgement that build a culture of respect and kindness.

What's special about Owairoa Primary?

Owairoa Primary School is more than just a school. It's a family and that family ethos underpins everything we do. We're a richly diverse community where over 63 cultures are represented, and we take enormous pride in celebrating that diversity through language, traditions and shared experiences. Every child who walks through our gates is valued for who they are and what they bring. What also makes our school unique is our commitment to balancing tradition with innovation, from pioneering programmes like Super Start for new entrants, and to creating the Digital Dream Lab where students engage with lessons like coding, robotics and 3D printing.



Whether it's through creative curriculum design, embracing technology, or building international connections, we're constantly seeking ways to inspire and engage the young minds of tomorrow. We deeply respect the school's history and the generations who came before us, but we're never afraid to look forward. That forward-thinking approach, combined with our strong sense of belonging, is what sets Owairoa Primary School apart.

Is there anything you'd like improved in the education/school management sector?

Education is always evolving and that's part of its beauty. But one challenge I see across the sector is the tension between compliance and creativity. Too often, principals and teachers are bogged down by administrative demands that pull focus away from what truly matters, inspiring and guiding our young people. If I could see one improvement, it would be to reduce some of that bureaucracy, to trust educators to do what they do best: teach, innovate and care. Schools should be places where imagination and possibility thrive, not where leaders and teachers are tied up in paperwork. Our role as principals is to create the conditions for great teaching and learning, removing barriers so that every child can achieve their potential.

How is the relationship between Owairoa Primary School and its immediate local community?

The relationship between Owairoa Primary School and our local community is incredibly strong and something I am deeply proud of. Our school is not just a place of learning; it's the heart of the community. My open-door policy means families are welcomed with warmth, respect and genuine care. Many families choose to move into this area specifically so their children can attend Owairoa Primary School, and that speaks volumes about the trust and reputation of the Owairoa Family we have built together.

We maintain close partnerships with local organisations, cultural groups and community initiatives, ensuring that our school reflects and serves the community it belongs to. For me, leadership is about building bridges between school and home, between cultures and between tradition and innovation. That's what keeps our community so strong and ensures that Owairoa Primary School continues to thrive as a great place of learning and belonging.