



**Te Tāhuhu o
te Mātauranga**
Ministry of Education

Aspiring Principal Programme

Guidance for applicants
September 2025

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The aspiring principal programme

Congratulations on making a proactive career choice towards principalship.

Launching in 2026, the Aspiring Principal Programme (the programme) is one of the ways the Ministry and Principals are working together to support the principals | tumuaki of the future. Making an application for one of the 200 places available in the programme will be a pivotal step in your leadership journey to becoming a principal | tumuaki in a school or kura.

About the programme

The programme aims to prepare you to lead a school | kura with clarity, cultural competence, and strategic focus. The programme will be designed to combine structured learning, collaboration, and personalised support to connect theory with practice, and will be built around three complementary modes of learning:

Learning about	Self-directed opportunities to explore the role and responsibilities of principalship at your own pace, and in response to emerging learning needs. Examples could include online modules, podcasts, and curated resources.
Learning with	Facilitated, collaborative opportunities to work alongside other aspiring principals to build your leadership capability, share experiences, and develop lasting professional networks.
Learning alongside	One-to-one mentoring and coaching from experienced principals to provide support as you learn, face challenges, reflect on practice, and grow into your leadership style. This includes supporting you with a leadership project in your school.

Programme commitment and release time contribution

Should you be accepted into the programme, more specific detail of the programme will be confirmed by the provider. Full consideration will be given to the existing workload of full-time teachers, including those in leadership roles, as the programme details are confirmed.

Commitment to the programme, including meeting programme expectations, will be carefully managed alongside your teaching workload, other work commitments and time constraints. To further support your success, the Ministry will make a contribution of three teacher release days to your school or kura for each participant in the programme.

The mentor role

One to one mentoring is a key feature of the programme. Based on your individual learning needs, you will be matched with an experienced principal (other than your home-school principal) to support you throughout the programme. Matching will be undertaken by the programme provider taking into account your preferences, for example: your location, educational setting preferences, learning and cultural needs.

Mentors will share their own leadership journey and experiences and help you become a prepared, confident, and culturally responsive leader. They will provide guidance, challenge, encouragement and the opportunity to shadow them as a leader.

If your home-school principal has applied to become a mentor, you will not be matched with them. This is to ensure you are exposed to diverse leadership styles.

While you won't be matched with your current principal, their support is required to enter the programme. Part of their commitment will be to support you through the programme with applied learning through in-school tasks and a leadership project.

Making an application – what you need to know and do

Who should apply

The programme is open to experienced educators with high levels of leadership aspiration and potential. You do not need to be an assistant or deputy principal to apply.

Becoming a school principal | tumuaki has many great personal and community benefits, but it is not without its challenges. Before making an application, consider the following:

- Do I intend to apply for principal roles within the next 2 to 3 years?
- Am I ready to commit to a year-long programme with diverse programme components while continuing to meet current role expectations?
- Can I demonstrate formal or informal leadership experience in my current or past roles?

If you can answer yes to all three questions, we welcome your application. Please note, there are also specific [eligibility criteria](#) that must be met to be considered for the programme.

How to apply

An online application including career and leadership highlights and impact must be completed, and eligibility criteria must be met. In addition, you will need to secure a referee who can complete an endorsement form.

Before you start your application:

1. Talk with your current principal | tumuaki about their support of you to participate and complete the programme requirements. You need to secure their support to make an application and to complete an in-school project as part of the programme.
2. Choose a referee. Your referee can be your current or previous principal but does not have to be – it can be someone else. Your referee should be someone who knows your leadership strengths and aspirations and who can assess your current leadership knowledge and experience, as well as your capacity to complete the programme.

We recommend sharing a link to the programme webpage (which holds referee instructions) when requesting their endorsement. See the section below on [referee endorsement](#) for further details.

Programme eligibility

To be eligible to apply, you must:

- Be currently employed as a permanent teacher (at least 0.6 full-time teacher equivalent (FTTE)) in a New Zealand state or state-integrated school or kura.
- Hold a Tiwhikete Whakaakoranga Tūturu | Full Practising Certificate (Category One).
- Have a minimum of four years FTTE teaching experience, including at least two years in New Zealand state or state-integrated school settings.
- Have informed and received the support of your current principal | tumuaki.

All applications will be reviewed by the Ministry to confirm eligibility, and that a referee has endorsed you by completing a referee endorsement form.

Referee endorsement

Choosing your current principal to also act as your referee is an obvious choice, but not the only one. You can choose a previous principal or someone who knows you well enough to assess your leadership ability and potential across several capability areas.

Referees will be required to complete an endorsement form, including an assessment of your existing leadership competency based on the Teaching Council Educational Leadership Capability Framework:

“The Capability Framework gives life to the Leadership Strategy | Rautaki Kaihautū and outlines the core educational capabilities needed for effective leadership across different levels of the profession. It provides all teachers with a practical tool to identify, grow and develop their leadership capability. It also illustrates what leadership looks like in practice, in kura [and] schools....”

Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand

[Teaching Council Educational Leadership Capability Framework | Teaching Council](#)

Referees will be asked to provide information about their relationship to you and then to complete a competency assessment of you across several capability areas. You will need to provide them with your Ministry of Education Number so we can match your application to their endorsement.

Instructions and guidance for referees to complete an online endorsement form is available on the programme webpage on the Education Workforce website.

[insert link to referee section]

Application evaluation

The 200 programme places available are contestable. Once the application period is closed, each application and accompanying referee endorsement is assessed, scored and weighted to create a ranked list of applicants which is then moderated.

The assessment, including moderation, will be undertaken by a panel of Ministry staff, leadership advisors and other education sector peak-body representatives.

The application weighted assessment framework evaluates:

- Leadership capability, cultural responsiveness, and career progression (55% *weighting*).
- Referee assessment (30% *weighting*).
- Demographic information and existing leadership involvement (15% *weighting*).

If the number of high-quality applications is greater than the 200 places available, equity and inclusion factors will be considered.

Completing your application

The format of the application includes demographic data, referee details, an eligibility check and three long-form responses about your career, aspirations and leadership impact to date. You will also be asked to make a declaration and confirm the information provided is correct.

The three key questions ask you to detail your:

- teaching career
- leadership experience
- principalship | tumuaki aspirations.

In all three responses, consider your commitment to equity, inclusion and to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Include examples where you have:

- Demonstrated a clear understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and its implications for school leadership.
- Embedded Te Tiriti principles in strategic planning, curriculum design, and community engagement.
- Advocated for equity and inclusion in teaching and leadership decisions.
- Led initiatives that promote mana ōrite mō te mātauranga Māori.

Each of the three questions asked must be answered in 250 words or less. The assessment panel will only review and assess your first 250 words in each response. The information you provide in the long-form responses will form the basis of your application assessment.

We recommend drafting and reviewing your responses based on the guidance below before copying them into the online application form.

Teaching career

Share your key teaching experiences, passions and interests; school contexts and roles that have shaped your development as an educator.

Provide more than a summary of your qualifications. This is your opportunity to share the milestones that have shaped your specific journey as an educator. Reflect on the moments that influenced your teaching practice and illustrate the values, insights, and growth that define your leadership.

Consider including:

- Key turning points in your career.
- Impactful roles, initiatives, or innovations you've led.
- Evidence of growth in pedagogy, cultural capability, or relational practice.
- Contributions to school-wide improvement and student outcomes.

Be specific and reflective. The assessment panel will want to see who you are becoming, not just where you've been.

Leadership experience

Describe formal and informal leadership roles you've held during your education career and in the wider community. Share examples of how you've led others, influenced change, or contributed to collective growth. Briefly outline your current leadership strengths and areas you're working to develop.

Demonstrate how you've taken on leadership, whether through formal education roles or by showing initiative in other settings. You're not limited to describing your educational leadership alone, we welcome examples from any context where you've led, influenced, or made a meaningful impact.

Think holistically and consider including:

- What type of leader you are.
- Times you've led teams, projects, or professional learning.
- Moments where you've influenced school culture or practice.
- Contributions to education networks, iwi, or community groups.
- Where you feel confident and where you're still growing.

The assessment panel will value both formal and informal leadership roles. Focus on impact, not position.

Principalship | tumuaki aspirations

Share your aspirations and motivation for becoming a principal | tumuaki. What kind of school or settings inspire you? Describe any steps you've already taken to prepare for leading, including professional learning or leadership development.

Describe why you're drawn to principalship and how are preparing for it.

Consider including:

- What drives your interest in school leadership.
- The values and vision you'd bring to a principal role.
- The types of school contexts and communities you are drawn too.
- Mentoring, professional learning and development, or leadership programmes you've engaged with.

- How your experiences so far have shaped your readiness.

The assessment panel are looking for purpose, clarity, and commitment.

Attestation: privacy and declaration

To complete your application, you will be required to complete an attestation covering privacy and a declaration confirming:

- The information supplied is accurate.
- That you have met the eligibility criteria and have the support of your principal to apply.
- You understand and agree to how data collected will be used and shared.
- You know you can request the information held.

Tip for completing your application online:

If you use the same browser (e.g. Chrome, Safari, Bing etc) and device you do not need to complete your online application in one sitting.

Application process checklist

Steps	Who	Actions
1. Review eligibility 2. Confirm support	Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/> Confirm you meet all applicant eligibility criteria. <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure you have your home-school principal support to apply.
3. Identify a referee	Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/> Talk to your nominated referee about your plans and whether they consider you are ready to join the programme. <input type="checkbox"/> Share your MOE number with them to include in the endorsement form. This will ensure the Ministry can link your application to their endorsement.
4. Prepare your application	Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/> Gather the required details (MoE number, registration, school information, career history and achievements). <input type="checkbox"/> Draft written responses of no more than 250 words to the three long form questions on your career, leadership experience and aspirations.
5. Submit application online	Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete the programme application form, check the eligibility criteria and ensure you complete the attestation and declaration sections.
6. Submit endorsement online	Referee	<input type="checkbox"/> Complete and submit the applicant referee endorsement form.
7. Follow up (if needed)	Applicant	<input type="checkbox"/> Follow up with the referee to ensure the endorsement is submitted.
8. Eligibility/referee check	Ministry	<input type="checkbox"/> Review application for applicant eligibility and referee endorsement form for completeness.
9. Application acceptance	Ministry	<input type="checkbox"/> Follow up for missing/incomplete information. <input type="checkbox"/> Match referee and applicant

Application form link, webpage and contact us

Go to the application form:

[Aspiring Principal Programme Application Form](#)

Go to the Aspiring Principal Programme webpage:

[Aspiring Principal Programme | Education Workforce](#)

Contact us if you have questions, we're here to help:

principal.pathway@education.govt.nz