



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

# Endorsing an aspiring principal programme applicant

**Guidance for applicant referees  
September 2025**

# Contents

<b>Supporting aspiring principals .....</b>	<b>2</b>
About the aspiring principal programme .....	2
Mentor   participant matching .....	2
<b>Completing the applicant referee endorsement form .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Who should complete this form? .....	3
Your details and relationship with the applicant .....	3
Assessment scale .....	3
Capabilities .....	4
Attestation and declaration .....	6
Useful links and contact us.....	6

# Supporting aspiring principals

From 2026, the Aspiring Principal Programme (the programme) will accommodate up to 200 participants each year. As part of the programme application process, each applicant is required to secure a referee to endorse their application.

Acting as a referee is an opportunity to support future school leaders.

**In your role as referee, you will be required to complete an endorsement form assessing the applicant's leadership potential and capability in key capability areas.**

## About the aspiring principal programme

The programme aims to equip participants 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.

The programme will be built around three complementary modes of learning, with a key feature of the programmes being one to one mentoring by an experienced principal:

<b>Learning about</b>	<b>Self-directed opportunities</b> 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.
<b>Learning with</b>	<b>Facilitated, collaborative opportunities</b> to work alongside other aspiring principals to build your leadership capability, share experiences, and develop lasting professional networks.
<b>Learning alongside</b>	<b>One-to-one- mentoring and coaching</b> from experienced principals to provide support as you learn, face challenges, reflect on practice, and grow into your leadership style.

## Mentor | participant matching

Programme participants will be matched by the programme provider with principal mentors. Matching will consider multiple factors – school setting, location, and cultural needs for example. Mentors will share their own leadership journey and experiences and help programme participants become prepared, confident, and culturally responsive leaders. They will provide guidance, challenge, and encouragement.

If you are acting as a referee for a current staff member and are also thinking about becoming a mentor or have already made a mentor application, you will not be matched with a programme participant who is part of your staff. This is to ensure they are exposed to diverse leadership styles.

If you are currently working as a principal and interested in becoming a mentor, please go to the mentor webpage on the Education Workforce website. Success for the aspiring principals in this programme and the beginning principal programme relies on having a significant and diverse pool of mentors to draw on.

Click on the link to find out more: [Mentor an aspiring or beginning principal | Education Workforce](#)

## Completing the applicant referee endorsement form

The following provides step-by-step instructions for completing **the applicant referee endorsement form**. The key focus of the endorsement form is to complete an assessment of the applicant's strengths and experience against key leadership capability areas. Each applicant must be endorsed to be considered for the programme.

**The referee endorsement will count towards 30% of the applicant's assessment score for entry into the programme.**

### Who should complete this form?

The form can be completed by an experienced (current or recent) principal, or another suitable professional who has known the applicant and is willing to act as their referee. Referees need to be able to attest to the applicant's leadership capabilities.

### Your details and relationship with the applicant

You will be asked to provide some details about you and your relationship with the applicant. You will also be asked to provide the applicant's Ministry of Education number so we can match your endorsement to their application.

### Assessment scale

You will be asked to assess the applicant's leadership potential across core capability areas. Using a 5-point scale, you will need to indicate the level at which you believe the applicant operates for each area.

If you have any concerns about the applicant's readiness to step into a principal role within the next two to three years, we suggest discussing this with them directly.

The following rating scale will be used to assess the applicant's competency in each capability area:

Rating	Description
5 - Exceptional	Consistently demonstrates outstanding competency
4 - Strong	Performs confidently and effectively
3 - Competent	Adequately demonstrates competency
2 - Developing	Partially demonstrates; emerging competency
1 - Limited	Rarely demonstrates competency; requires significant development
Unknown / unable to assess	Select this option if you have not observed or do not have sufficient information to rate their level of competency

## Capabilities

Using the rating scale, you will be asked to rate the applicant against the following capability statements. These are based on the [Teaching Council Educational Leadership Capability Framework](#).

Capability area	Description
<b>Relational and cultural leadership</b>	
<b>Building and sustaining high-trust relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Builds strong, respectful relationships with colleagues, students, whānau, and wider community.</li> <li>Demonstrates empathy, active listening, and relational leadership in current role.</li> <li>Seeks feedback and uses it to strengthen trust and collaboration.</li> </ul>
<b>Culturally responsive practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Actively engages with Te Tiriti o Waitangi and applies culturally sustaining practices.</li> <li>Advocates for equity and inclusion in teaching and leadership decisions.</li> <li>Demonstrates growing confidence in leading culturally responsive initiatives.</li> </ul>

Capability area	Description
<b>Collective leadership and professional community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contributes to team leadership and fosters collaboration across staff.</li> <li>• Supports others' growth through mentoring, coaching, or leading Professional learning and development.</li> <li>• Demonstrates initiative in building a positive, learning-focused culture.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategic and organisational leadership</b>	
<b>Strategic thinking and planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participates in strategic planning processes and understands school-wide goals.</li> <li>• Aligns team or curriculum initiatives with broader school vision.</li> <li>• Shows potential to lead strategic change with clarity and purpose.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation practice in relation to outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflects on own leadership and teaching impact using evidence.</li> <li>• Supports data-informed decision-making within teams.</li> <li>• Demonstrates growing capability in evaluating and improving practice.</li> </ul>
<b>Managing resources effectively</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the basics of resource allocation and school operations.</li> <li>• Manages team or curriculum resources efficiently and ethically.</li> <li>• Shows readiness to take on broader operational responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Attending to personal learning and wellbeing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engages in ongoing professional learning aligned with leadership goals.</li> <li>• Models self-awareness, resilience, and wellbeing practices.</li> <li>• Actively seeks opportunities to grow leadership capability.</li> </ul>
<b>Embodying values and moral purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads with integrity, optimism, and a strong sense of purpose.</li> <li>• Advocates for learners and staff with moral courage.</li> <li>• Demonstrates alignment with the values of principalship.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership attributes</b>	
<b>Thought leadership &amp; innovative thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embraces creativity and challenges conventional thinking.</li> <li>• Initiates and leads change that improves outcomes for learners.</li> <li>• Demonstrates curiosity, future-focused thinking, and a growth mindset.</li> </ul>

Capability area	Description
<b>Leading learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Champions high-quality teaching and learning aligned with the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Marautanga o Aotearoa.</li> <li>Models effective pedagogy and supports teacher development.</li> <li>Uses evidence to improve teaching practice and learner outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership in practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leads initiatives that contribute to school-wide improvement.</li> <li>Shares expertise and collaborates across teams.</li> <li>Demonstrates readiness to lead beyond their current role.</li> </ul>
<b>People leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communicates clearly, respectfully, and with emotional intelligence.</li> <li>Builds strong teams and fosters a positive, inclusive culture.</li> <li>Demonstrates integrity, fairness, and ethical leadership.</li> </ul>
<b>Self-leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shows resilience and composure under pressure.</li> <li>Adapts to change and uncertainty with confidence.</li> <li>Manages time, priorities, and personal wellbeing effectively.</li> <li>Demonstrates motivation, initiative, and a strong sense of purpose.</li> </ul>

**You will then be asked to provide an overall assessment of the applicant and have the opportunity to provide additional comments and context for your responses.**

### Attestation and declaration

You will be asked to agree to a disclaimer. Please note that by completing this section you are confirming that the information you have provided is accurate to the best of your knowledge. You will also be asked to agree that you understand how the information you have been provided, including that your personal information will be used for programme purposes and that you give your consent for its use.

If you are uncertain or feel unable to complete the reference, please contact us. We're happy to discuss and support as needed: [principal.pathway@education.govt.nz](mailto:principal.pathway@education.govt.nz)

### Useful links and contact us

Go to applicant referee endorsement form:

[Applicant Referee Endorsement 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](mailto:principal.pathway@education.govt.nz)