

Explore whenua

Connection to the land and roots

What is whenua?

Whenua is the place where you stand. It is your connection to the land – a source of life, nourishment and wellbeing for everyone.

Whenua includes soil, rocks, plants, animals and the people inhabiting the land – tangata whenua. We are linked physically and spiritually to the land – it is the earth through which you are connected to your tūpuna/ancestors and all the generations that will come after you.

You can also think about whenua as your place of belonging – that means the spaces where you feel comfortable, safe and able to be yourself.

Why is whenua an important way to wellbeing at school or kura?

There may be many ways people are connected to their whenua, including multiple places where you feel a sense of belonging.

School and kura can be one of those places, and ideally will be a place where all of the school community can feel connected. The physical environment is important, but if your place of learning is not welcoming

and inclusive, it will also have an impact on the wellbeing of your whole school or kura community.

Exploring your way to wellbeing at school or kura through whenua

Please adapt these activity ideas to suit your needs.

- Ask tauira to explore what whenua means to them. Invite them to prepare a presentation, skit, video, waiata/song, poem or dance that represents what whenua means to them. They could do this individually or in small groups.
- Create an indoor garden in your classroom or staffroom and assign tamariki/tauira or kaiako to look after a plant.
- Have a lunchtime litter clean-up and talk to tamariki about the importance of being a tidy Kiwi. Challenge tauira and kaiako to bring in waste-free lunches.
- Ask tauira to pitch initiatives your school or kura could implement to become more environmentally friendly.
- Take tamariki/tauira on a nature walk – encourage them to be as quiet as possible and take notice of their environment.

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- Point out the [native plants](#) and [animals](#) and get them to identify their names or draw them.
- Ask tauira to research the local area of the school or kura. Encourage them to discover the closest maunga/mountain, awa/river or moana/ocean and create a pepeha for the school or kura: <https://pepeha.nz>
- Teach your tamariki/tauira a morning karakia that acknowledges the whenua. (An example is provided on the following page).
- Head outdoors for a shared lunch and invite wider whānau. Encourage people to bring something from the whenua to contribute – the possibilities are endless!
- Hold a school-wide nature art competition. Invite tauira and kaiako alike to submit artwork/photography which showcases the ways people connect to the whenua and what it means to them. Hold an exhibition in your school or kura hall for the school community to visit.



Photo by: @the.mint.trip

For example:

**KORIHI TE MANU
TĀKIRI MAI I TE ATA
KA AO, KA AO, KA AWATEA
TIHEI MAURI ORA**

THE BIRD SINGS
THE MORNING HAS DAWNED
THE DAY HAS BROKEN
BEHOLD THERE IS LIFE.