

Choosing the Right School for Your Tamariki

In My Shoes
Tips for Whanau



Choosing the right school is a particular concern for many parents of children with ASD because of the additional help their children require. Maori parents are concerned not only that their children's special needs will be adequately provided for, but also that these needs will be met in a culturally appropriate way in an environment that values and supports Maori cultural beliefs, values and practices.

Below is a questionnaire Bernie Wastney devised when looking for a school for her son Michael. It is shared in the hopes that it will be useful to other Maori parents who have children with ASD. It is also hoped that the questionnaire will alert educators to a number of parental priorities and concerns.

Questions Regarding School and School Policies

- ✓ Does this school have a special needs unit?
- ✓ If so, what percentage of my child's day is likely to be spent in the unit and what percentage of time will they be mainstreamed?
- ✓ What are the benefits of having a special needs unit?
- ✓ If my child is 100% mainstreamed, what provisions do you have in place for his specific learning needs, sensory issues or behaviours?
- ✓ What experience does your staff have in dealing with children on the Autism spectrum?
- ✓ How many children with my child's level of autism, has your current staff dealt with?
- ✓ What type of funding does your school receive for special needs children and how is it used?
- ✓ If my child is classified as having very high or high needs (ORRS funded) how will the funding he attracts be distributed and how many teacher aide hours will be allocated?
- ✓ If my child does not receive any government funding, how will the school deal with their specific learning needs, sensory issues, social issues and behaviours?
- ✓ Who will be responsible for my child while he is at your school- eg, do you have someone who will become familiar with him and his specific needs, and be his advocate especially as he transitions from year to year, or will this responsibility rest on his new teacher each year?
- ✓ Will my child attend school full time?
- ✓ What are the advantages of coming to this school? What are your strengths?
- ✓ Can you see any disadvantages in coming to this school?
- ✓ Is there representation for children with special needs on the BOT?

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Questions Regarding Cultural Issues

- ✓ What Maori programmes or teaching does this school offer my child?
- ✓ How many Maori teachers or teacher aides are there in this school?
- ✓ Are the teachers, teacher aides, specialists and therapists who work within this school environment knowledgeable or sensitive to Maori cultural needs / tikanga?
- ✓ Is the school open to input or increasing their awareness of Maori cultural needs?
- ✓ Is there Maori representation on the Board of Trustees and PTA?
- ✓ What relationship does the school have with the Maori Community and how is this relationship maintained?
- ✓ Do you have a kapa haka group in this school, and is my child able to join?
- ✓ Will there be a powhiri to welcome my child and our whanau into this school?
- ✓ Is there an expectation that my child will participate in all activities in regards to our Maori culture? (eg pōwhiri, kapa haka, marae visit, tangi)
- ✓ If my child needs assistance in toileting, dressing or showering, will you make allowances regarding physical handling which is sensitive to cultural needs?
- ✓ What is your policy regarding use, storage and administering of Rongoa? (Maori medicine)
- ✓ Are your school and your staff prepared to cater for or make allowances for our cultural needs in regards to karakia (prayer) before eating?
- ✓ Who is my child likely to have as his teacher aide? What is their experience and training relevant to Maori and ASD?
- ✓ Are my whanau able to attend IEPs and other school meetings and if so, do you have the facilities to cater for them?



Questions Regarding Learning Outcomes

- ✓ Are there any particular programmes you have in place specifically for children with ASD, and how successful are they?
- ✓ What programmes are you likely to implement for my child?
- ✓ Is there ongoing training or professional development about ASD? Who is likely to participate in this training?
- ✓ What type of specialists do you use in this school and how often do you meet with them?
- ✓ Will my child be included in all the school activities?
- ✓ What alternatives are in place if my child is unable to attend any of the school activities/outings?

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Questions Regarding Family/Whanau

- ✓ Do you encourage parental input, particularly regarding behavioural issues and learning outcomes?
- ✓ Do parents have the opportunity to meet with the teacher aide/s who are likely to be spending the most time with my child?
- ✓ What protocols will you use for communication between the teacher, teacher aide, parents and whanau?
- ✓ If parents have a complaint, what procedures do you have in place for hearing these complaints?
- ✓ If a programme has been successful at home, is the school open to adapting their school programmes in light of this programme?



Who will be with my child at intervals and lunchtimes, and where is this likely to be?

- ✓ If my child needs assistance in toileting, dressing or showering:
 - a) Do you have suitable facilities?
 - b) What is your policy regarding physical handling of my child?
 - c) Who will be responsible for the above?
- ✓ How many children are in my child's class or special needs unit?
- ✓ What are the class sizes likely to be as he/she progresses?
- ✓ Geographical placement of the school: For example, is my child going to be at risk if the school is on a main road, or intersection? If my child is considered a runner, how many exits are there to the school, and what are the potential risks in the neighbourhood if he manages to escape?
- ✓ If my child is a climber, are the fences high enough, or are there apparatus that can be used as a ladder?
- ✓ If my child puts everything in his/her mouth, are there any obvious poisons or poisonous plants which are within my child's reach?
- ✓ When potential hazards are identified by parents/whanau, are the school prepared to make necessary alterations to suit my child's needs?

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