

Ko Taku Reo – Deaf Education New Zealand

<https://www.kotakureo.school.nz/index.php>

of unique students – 88

Type of provider – School, public, special institution

Primary distance modality – Synchronous

Background

Ko Taku Reo – Deaf Education New Zealand (Ko Taku Reo) can trace its origins back to the establishment of the Sumner School for the Deaf in Christchurch in 1880 (later named van Asch College then Van Asch Deaf Education Centre). In July 2020, the Kelston Deaf Education Centre in Auckland (which had been established as Kelston School for the Deaf in 1958) and the Van Asch Deaf Education Centre in Christchurch merged to form Ko Taku Reo as a single national organisation.

Following amendments to the *Education Act 1989*, all children have the right to enrol at school and take part in the New Zealand curriculum regardless of their needs. Ko Taku Reo makes that possible for students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing through services provided at the student’s local school or one of the three specialist schools in Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch.

Governance

Under the *Education and Training Act 2020* Ko Taku Reo is described as a “special institution,” which is defined a state school that is:

- (a) for the time being specified in Schedule 2; or
- (b) a distance school

In the case of Ko Taku Reo it is one of nine schools listed under Schedule 2. The act requires that as state schools, special institutions must have a board. However, as a special institution the board is determined by the Minister of Education – with the exception of a student representative, who is elected “by students (other than adult students) enrolled full-time in year 9 or above at... [the] special institution administered by the board” (Government of New Zealand, 2024a, p. 686).

The regulations governing special institutions are largely the same as any other state school, with the exception that a board administering a special institution may not combine with a board that administers other categories of state schools.

At present, the Minister has appointed a commissioner to act as the board of trustees under section 181(1) of the *Education and Training Act 2020*. This appointment was outlined in the *Notice of Appointment of a Commissioner for the Ko Taku Reo – Deaf Education New Zealand (903) Board* (Government of New Zealand, 2022).

Resourcing

Ko Taku Reo is resourced primarily through two different funding models. The first model is where the school is funded on a full-time equivalency basis for students who are enrolled with the school, which was approximately 120 students in 2023. This funding consists of both teacher salaries and operations money, with a rate that is higher than other public schools due to their status as a special school (a sensory specialist school to be precise).

The second model is where Ko Taku Reo is funded directly by the Ministry of Education through contracts to provide a national network of services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students who are not directly enrolled with the school, which was approximately 2900 students in 2023 (Ministry of Education, 2021). In an effort to provide some of those services in a distance learning context, Ko Taku Reo created two administrative positions to directly support this online delivery model (i.e., a Head of Online Learning and a Deputy Online Learning Lead). The school has also become one of the first in the country to utilise the Ministry of Education's Te Rito (i.e., *Edsby*) platform as a learning management system.

Programming

Ko Taku Reo offers three types of programming. The first programme is an Online Resource Teacher of the Deaf programme. This programme aims to connect Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners who are usually taught in their local school. These learners are often isolated from other Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners and potentially face problems connecting with Deaf and Hard of Hearing peers. These students receive some face-to-face support from a Resource Teacher of the Deaf as part of their ongoing support. The online programme aims to supplement this by connecting groups of four to seven learners twice weekly and they undertake a range of activities to support literacy and development of their Deaf identity.

The second programme is the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) New Zealand Sign Language. This programme aims to teach students the skills required to pass NCEA New Zealand Sign Language achievement standards at levels 1, 2 and 3.¹ To enrol on these courses, students must qualify as a Deaf and Hard of Hearing learner themselves (the school's resources do not allow them to provide tuition for non-Deaf and Hard of Hearing learners). Class size is usually four to 10 in size and students receive the same amount of tuition as face-to-face NCEA classes (i.e., four hours per week). Teaching is a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous tuition.

The third programme is Year 9/10 New Zealand Sign Language. This programme aims to introduce learners to New Zealand Sign Language and acts as a primer for those wanting to study it at a higher level (i.e., NCEA level 1). Students must be Deaf and Hard of Hearing and receive service from Ko Taku Reo. These students have two 45-minute synchronous sessions per week. In many ways this programme is similar to a Year 9/10 course in any second language course in a high school setting (e.g., French, German or Spanish).

¹ For more information see <https://www2.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/subjects/select-subject/nzsl/>

Finally, Ko Taku Reo indicated that a large proportion of their online students were of either Māori or Pasifika ethnicity, so they strive to ensure their distance learning practices are bi-culturally inclusive. Examples of this effort include having an opening and closing karakia (which the students will often lead) or when learning New Zealand Sign Language both the New Zealand Sign Language signs and the Te Reo equivalent are taught. Other language week's, including Sāmoan and Te Wiki o te Reo Māori, are celebrated. Ko Taku Reo also uses *Google Earth* to allow students to “take us” to their place of birth or where their ancestors came from and share information about those places. Additionally, the school looks for Māori and Pasifika role models that the students might identify with when considering teaching and learning activities.

Activity

Overall, Ko Taku Reo provided distance learning for 88 unique students (21 were from students of Māori descent) during the 2023 school year.

| Name of the programming | Frequency of class meeting | Nature of delivery | Number of students | Number of Māori students |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Online Resource Teacher of the Deaf | 2 x 40 minutes/week | 90% synchronous 10% asynchronous | 27 | 10 |
| NCEA New Zealand Sign Language | 3 hours/week (plus 1 hour asynchronous) | 75% synchronous 25% asynchronous | 30 | 6 |
| Year 9/10 New Zealand Sign Language | 2 x 40 minutes synchronous/week | 100% synchronous | 31 | 5 |