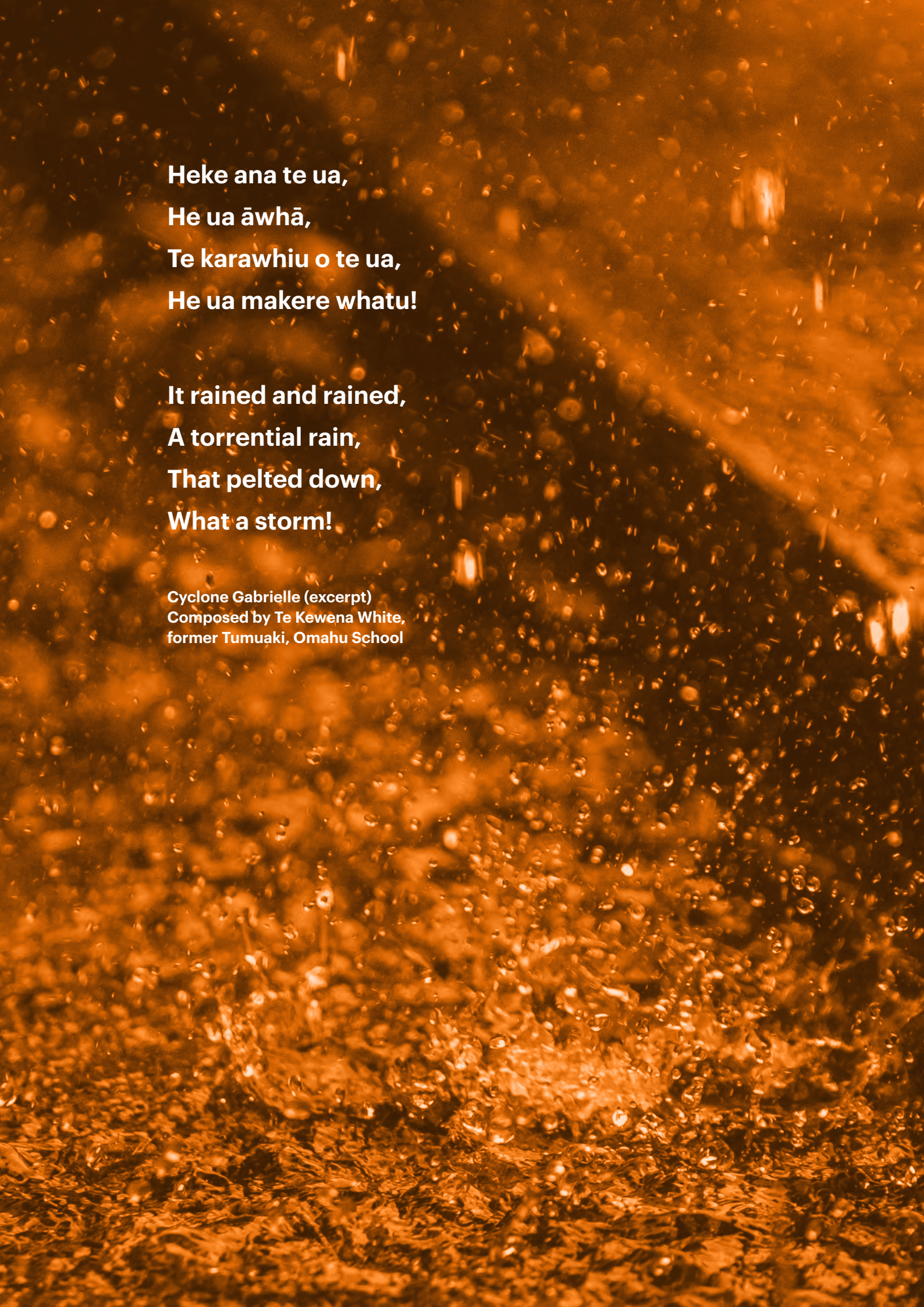
WE ARE STILL HERE

How educators in Te Matau-a-Māui have supported their communities in the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle

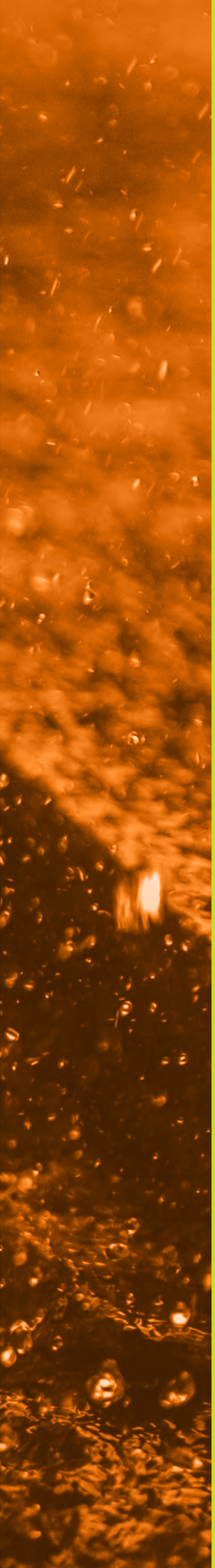
NZEI TE RIU ROA



Heke ana te ua,
He ua āwhā,
Te karawhiu o te ua,
He ua makere whatu!

It rained and rained,
A torrential rain,
That pelted down,
What a storm!

Cyclone Gabrielle (excerpt)
Composed by Te Kewena White,
former Tumuaki, Omahu School



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Foreword

In February 2023, Cyclone Gabrielle vented its fury on parts of the North Island, many already reeling from recent weather events. This report by NZEI Te Riu Roa is timely in that it reminds us that this was a major disaster; recovery will be a long, slow and arduous process. The people of the region deserve not to be forgotten.

This report is also important because it highlights a sector that is under-recognised and rarely acknowledged for the significant role it plays in community disaster response and recovery. My research into disaster contexts throughout the Asia-Pacific region over the last decade or so has revealed, time and time again, that schools go above and beyond for their communities, even though they are often victims themselves. There are many similarities to my research in the themes that come through in this report but there are also new recommendations to take on board. Scientists remind us that climate change means that the one-in-one-hundred-year flood or storm will become more commonplace. System-wide planning for these events is now imperative – as is listening to local voices and understanding that every event and community will be different.

I want to note, too, that while schools willingly and selflessly supported their communities through Cyclone Gabrielle, they were doing this on top of years of overwork and frustration. This report notes on-going staffing, workload, funding and resourcing issues. Added to that, schools were recovering from three years of disruption caused by Covid-19. My most recent research on Covid-19 talks again of schools stepping up – delivering devices, food and supplies to their families and working long hours to prepare and deliver on-line learning – leading to exhaustion and burnout. It is important that Cyclone Gabrielle is not seen as a one-off event that will be over soon when everyone can get on with their lives – especially not schools, who continue to pick up the pieces long after the cameras have gone.

I commend this report and the NZEI Te Riu Roa for bringing the seriousness of the cyclone event to our attention again and for reminding us of the willingness and selflessness of schools when disasters hit their communities. It is timely, however, to note that while schools are the hubs of their communities, they can only continue to do this with support and recognition from all levels of the education and political system and from all sectors of society.

These are challenging times and they require us all to work together for the sake of our tamariki and mokopuna and their futures.

Nāu te rourou, nāku te rourou, ka ora ai te iwi

Professor Carol Mutch
University of Auckland

Summary of findings

Six strong themes emerged in this research. Similar themes are also evident in the large body of existing research on the place of school and ECE centres in a disaster context. While explored more fully in the below report, the six themes are summarised here.

1. The impact on the community

The cyclone had a profound impact on the community, including school staff and students as well as the wider community beyond the school gate. Teachers and principals were quick to act and support their communities, recognising the unique role they play in connecting their community and providing a safe haven for impacted whānau.

2. Cyclone-related learning needs

Damage to schools and cyclone related trauma introduced additional challenges for educators. It is important to recognise that this comes in a context where schools are already experiencing increases in students presenting with additional and complex needs, as well as the mental health and wellbeing impacts of the pandemic.

3. Educators as quiet heroes

Despite their own lives being impacted by the cyclone, participants wanted to support their communities. Getting the school open quickly was seen as crucial to help restore a sense of normality for tamariki and allowing whānau to continue to work and contribute toward recovery efforts. While participants were humble about the support they offered their communities, their efforts were impressive and heroic.

4. Schools as hubs, schools as communities

A key theme in existing research on schools in disaster settings is that schools become hubs for their communities in times of disaster. This theme came across clearly in all interviews as participants expressed a clear sense of connection and duty to their school communities.

5. Workload impacts

One of the strongest themes in interviews was the massive increase in workload the cyclone created. Many raised concerns about the impacts such high workloads were having and questioned whether they were sustainable.

6. Staffing

In recognition of the cyclone's impact on workloads, the Ministry of Education granted affected schools additional staffing. For many participants, this was critical and timely support. It allowed some small school principals to be fully released which helped them continue to support their communities. In larger schools it meant extra release time in support of staff wellbeing. This was only guaranteed until the end of 2023, and participants worried about how they would cope when it was gone.

Summary of recommendations

The recommendations in this report are based on both the recommendations made by research participants during interviews as well as those from previous research into the role of schools in disasters, such as the Canterbury earthquakes or the Covid-19 pandemic.

1. Recognition of the distinct role schools play in disaster responses, and resourcing for support

Schools need to be recognised for the role they play in disaster responses. Despite a large body of research demonstrating this role that schools play, this seems to have been ignored by the Ministry of Education and central and local government disaster response agencies, and little meaningful change has been made. The first recommendation is to acknowledge that schools will often play this role by default. This needs to be accompanied by suitable resourcing and professional development.

2. Recognition of the role ECE centres play in disaster responses as being equal to that of schools, and resource them appropriately

Despite serving a similar function as schools in supporting their community through the recovery process, ECE centres do not get the same level of support from the Ministry of Education. For example, unlike schools, ECE centres received no extra staffing support. This needs to change as there is no reason for ECE centres to receive less support than schools.

3. System level support, resourcing and planning for climate related disasters

Participants unanimously felt it was a matter of if, and not when, further disaster events would occur. While the Ministry response to Gabrielle was in many ways commendable, it was reactive, inconsistent, and there is nothing to prevent future responses from being limited by government decisions such as fiscal restraint. As such, at risk schools should have access to dedicated funding for emergency equipment. A permanent climate team needs to be set up within the Ministry and tasked with providing pre-disaster support, education and risk mitigation, support during a disaster that is cognisant of extended disaster timelines, and post-disaster support for schools through the 'long tail' of disaster recovery. Climate change risk needs to be embedded in a consistent way across Ministry property decisions that consider both short, medium and long-term climate projections, including sea level rise, as well as the needs of communities in disaster responses, in particular rural communities and those where schools are most likely to become hubs in disasters.

4. Communications and energy security

Nearly every participant mentioned the importance of satellite internet connections and the availability of electricity generators to their response. Most did not already have these, which slowed the process of reopening schools. When schools did get power and satellite internet up and running, they became critical lifelines for entire communities many of whom were still without power or communications. If schools are default community hubs in disasters, then they need to be resourced with the right equipment to do this.

5. Extension of additional staffing for at least a further 12 months, additional curriculum staffing in primary schools to support education and pastoral care

Additional staffing provided to schools was only guaranteed until the end of 2023, however the impacts of the cyclone will continue for many years yet. Additional staffing needs to be extended for at least another 12 months in recognition of the slow recovery process and ongoing work this creates. Several reports over the past few years have pointed to the inadequacy of current primary school staffing levels and unjustified inequities in curriculum and management staffing between primary and secondary schools. These inequities in staffing levels need to be addressed as a matter of urgency in support of both ordinary education as well as the increased needs of students as a result of natural disasters and the pandemic.

6. Ongoing mental health and wellbeing support for ākonga and school staff

There has been widespread recognition of the mental health and wellbeing crisis schools are currently facing and the need to address this with robust in-school support. While mental health support was forthcoming in term one, it began to dry up after this and a general lack of councillors meant that even if the funding was available, support wasn't always accessible. There was a sense that the Ministry of Education did not understand the longer-term impact the cyclone will have on mental health and wellbeing. Moreover, it wasn't always clear to schools that supports were available. The Ministry needs to take a proactive approach to letting schools know such resourcing is available.

A positive development since this research was conducted was the funding announced in Budget 2023 for the mental wellbeing support for primary and intermediate school aged students through the expansion of the Mana Ake – Stronger for Tomorrow programme into Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti. This programme needs to be continued at the same time as mental health supports are built into ordinary primary school resourcing. The Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce highlighted that one of the inequities in the existing staffing entitlement is the absence of staffing for counsellors in the primary sector. This was echoed by 2021 Pūaotanga review of staffing in primary schools.
In order to meet the increased mental health needs of primary school students we recommend counselling be provided as a separate line in the primary staffing entitlement, as it is for secondary schools.

Above: Eskdale School's #wearestillhere hashtag was used in their campaign to save their building project and inspired the title of this report.

INTRODUCTION

The aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle sits heavily on Te Matau-a-Māui and other affected regions. It is a weight of both physical and psychological proportions. When the interviews for this research were conducted it had been six months since the deadly flooding hit the region, yet the mark of the cyclone was apparent everywhere. Huge mounds of silt flanked roads and smothered field upon field of once productive land. In places, cut through and piled up in an orderly way, in others, left exactly as it was when the flood waters began to recede. Participants said, 'you should have seen it before...'.

Most of the roads had been cleared and things were slowly returning to 'normal', yet what is on the surface is not always a good indication of what might lie below. 'Undercutting', a process whereby floodwaters tunnel beneath riverbanks, had been an issue since the February flooding. For one kaiako interviewed for this research, it is an apt metaphor for the cyclone's psychological impact:

There is so much undercutting going on destroying the roads that you wouldn't even know from the top... which is no different, I think from my own experiences... yes, I wasn't directly affected and I didn't have any trauma involved, but it's lots of little things that continue to go on for people in the long term that just slowly chip away.

As far as disaster response timelines are concerned, six months after an event of a scale such as Cyclone Gabrielle is early. It will take years for it all to fully come to the surface. How this is experienced will be different for different communities and depending on how prepared these communities were for the event.

Critical to this preparedness, and regularly active in the immediate, medium, and long-term aspects of disasters world over, are local schools and Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres. A growing body of international research has documented the vital role schools play in supporting and, ultimately, healing affected communities, where they often become a 'hub'; connecting people, resources and expertise, and providing food, shelter and ongoing support for those who need it.

In Aotearoa schools played a key role in the response to the 2010-2011 Canterbury earthquakes, even acting as first-responders in the case of the February 2011 quake that hit in the middle of a school day. In more recent memory, kaiako were vital lifelines to ākonga and their families during the Covid-19 lockdowns in 2020 and 2021. The following report presents evidence gathered from a small sample of interviews with teachers, principals, and school staff in the Hawke's Bay, about six months after the cyclone.

Professor Carol Mutch, whose groundbreaking work on Aotearoa's schools in disaster contexts is drawn on heavily throughout this report, considers teachers and principals to be the 'quiet heroes' of a disaster response.[1] This was certainly true of the many teachers and principals interviewed for this research. Reluctant to speak of themselves in this way, their heroism was nevertheless apparent in their actions. Capturing and sharing their stories was a key factor motivating this research. For those interviewed, however, their participation was most often motivated by action. They understood that it was a matter of when, and not if, the next disaster would happen. If people could learn from their experience in order to mitigate the impacts of the next disaster, then their participation was worthwhile. For this reason, this report concludes with a series of recommendations for governments and policy makers to implement in order to better prepare schools for future disasters.

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SCHOOLS IN DISASTER RESPONSES

Schools often become 'havens of normality and calm' during disaster recovery processes, acting as a vital anchoring point for communities.[2] They provide shelter and amenities for displaced people and serve a coordinating function during the recovery. Internationally, schools are recognised as playing an important role in disaster preparedness, response and recovery.[3]

Existing research

Reflecting on more than a decade of research into the role of schools in disaster response and recovery, Mutch categorises four themes that resonate with 'surprising consistency' between different schools, different disasters and different communities, including those her and others have studied outside New Zealand.[4]

Schools are local hubs for their communities

Schools will often become a focal point for local disaster responses. This might be through acting as a meeting place for community coordination, as a shelter for displaced families, or as a clearing house and storage for aide and donations. Schools are not only endowed with facilities that support such a role but are endowed with the expertise and connections needed to make it happen.

The principal's job changes during a traumatic event from one of educational leader to one of crisis manager

Principals are community leaders in ordinary times. When disaster strikes, a community will often look to them for a cool head and leadership. They are highly skilled delegators, negotiators and organisers who understand their communities, perhaps better than anyone else. They often become default crisis managers in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, and before the sometimes slow machinery of the state kicks in. They have a remarkable ability to understand the needs not only of the ākonga that attend their school, but of the families and wider community. Their role changes as the crisis cycle unfolds.[5] It can take a long time for their role to return to the 'core business' of teaching and learning. Several principals spoken to for this research were still involved in disaster response work, in some way or another, six months on from the cyclone.

Teachers play multiple roles from first response to ongoing support for students and their families

Teachers know the ākonga in their schools and will often put their wellbeing before their own. They understand how factors beyond the school gate impact the learning and livelihoods of tamariki. This is reflected from the first responses, when teachers will often put their own wellbeing aside to support children in an immediate disaster situation, through to longer term recovery, as teachers use their own expertise and knowledge of students to support them to understand and express their experiences and manage the trauma. This can greatly increase teacher workloads, leaving teachers exhausted with little time for themselves.

The importance of providing children and young people with opportunities to safely process their experiences

Related to the previous theme, schools become critical sites for children to safely process their experiences, be this through storytelling, art and art therapy or other forms of trauma informed practice.[6] Helping children understand their experiences and letting them work through the trauma is vital to their ongoing development. Conversely, untreated psychological trauma is a key aspect of what might be called the 'long tail' of a disaster response, which can extend well beyond years into decades and, for some, lifetimes.

Perhaps more than any other local institution, schools play a key role in all stages of the crisis cycle. All four of the above themes were found in the research conducted for this study. The consistency of these themes across different communities and different disasters says something almost universal about the critical role schools play in their communities.[7] Indeed, several participants interviewed for this research expressed the centrality of the school to their community, saying: 'if there is no school, there's no community'. It is little surprise, then, that schools take a central role in disaster responses, almost by default.

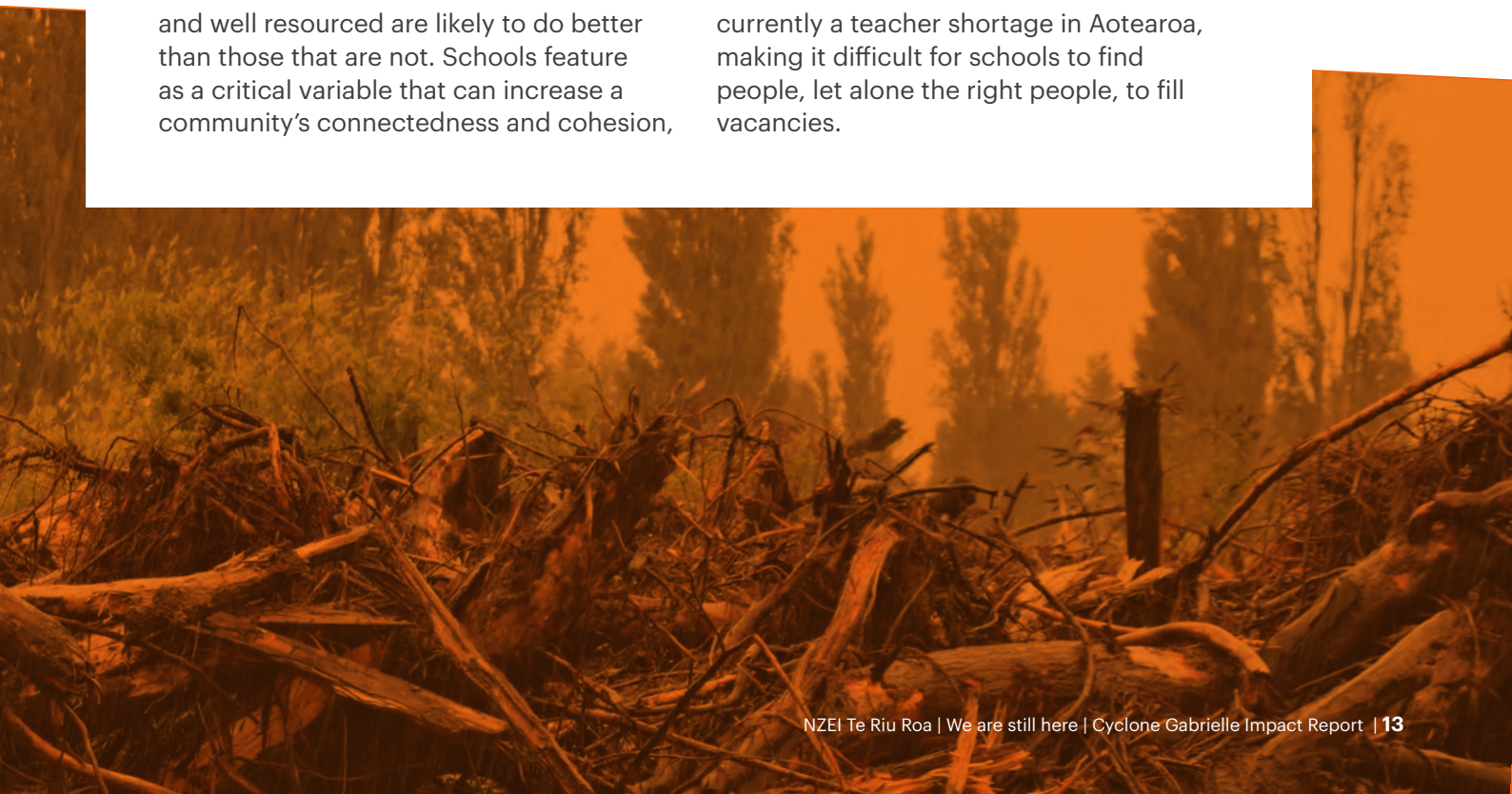
Left: Helping children understand their experiences – at play with toy road cones, tyres and "tent" at Puketapu School.

An ordinarily challenging environment

This is a huge responsibility for schools, and while they might 'undertake this role willingly, even at great personal and professional cost',[8] they often do so without explicit recognition of, and preparation for, such a role. Despite a growing body of evidence demonstrating the contributions schools make to disaster responses, schools continue to be overlooked when it comes to response and recovery planning. Indeed, in September 2023 when the Napier City Council chose to express gratitude to twenty-eight people and seven organisations who supported the regional response by awarding them with 'Cyclone Gabrielle Recognition Awards', not one teacher or school was included.[9] As Mutch reflects, 'while the expectations held of schools in post-disaster contexts are high, they feel under-prepared, under-resourced and underacknowledged for this critical role'.[10] As such, this research joins a chorus of previous research in arguing for increased recognition, resourcing and support in order to better prepare schools for future disaster responses.

The context in which a disaster happens will always impact the shape and, ultimately, success of the response and recovery.[11] Communities that are well connected and well resourced are likely to do better than those that are not. Schools feature as a critical variable that can increase a community's connectedness and cohesion, and therefore its disaster preparedness.[12] This means there is a relation between an 'ordinary' school context and its ability to step up in a disaster. As noted above, principals and teachers will almost always willingly do what is needed; the extent to which this comes at a cost to their own personal or professional wellbeing is strongly influenced by the existing context into which the disaster arrives.

The context of schools prior to the cyclone was one of ordinarily high levels of workload pressure and complexity.[13] This is the result of the failure of education resourcing to keep pace with the increased demands teachers face. In ECE, several years of frozen funding have only just begun to unwind. Workloads are unsustainable with many staff putting in considerable amounts of unpaid overtime.[14] The reasons for an increase in workload in both ECE and schooling are multiple: an increase in children presenting with additional and complex needs; increased expectations of whānau and governments; a litany of policy and curriculum changes often implemented without additional resourcing support, and a learning support system that in not resourced to adequately meet the needs of learners.[15] There is also currently a teacher shortage in Aotearoa, making it difficult for schools to find people, let alone the right people, to fill vacancies.



Canterbury earthquakes 2010-2011

A large body of research exists that considers the role of schools in response to the Canterbury earthquakes in 2010-2011, in particular the disastrous February 2011 quake that took the lives of 185 people and occurred in the middle of a school day. Teachers and principals acted as first responders, moving children into safer locations, reassuring them and in some cases waiting with them well into the evening until they were collected by guardians.

In the following months, schools continued to support their students and communities, including by implementing innovative programmes for helping students to process their experiences, such as art-based therapy and collective projects.[16] Throughout this time teachers frequently put the interests of their students before their own, despite having their own whānau and property affected by the quakes. While this was a laudable effort and, as those spoken to for this project often said, a normal thing for teachers to do, it eventually took its toll. As Mutch demonstrates, the 'constant pressure led not only to a decline in principals' and teachers' emotional and psychological wellbeing but in their physical health.'[17]

Over this period schools demonstrated again and again the crucial role they play in community cohesion and resilience in the face of a disaster. This was all thrown into disarray when, in September 2012, principals were made aware that Christchurch schools were subject to 'network re-organisations' that would see schools closed or merged with other schools. Communication between the Ministry of Education and schools was demonstrably poor and was rightly criticised in a 2017 Ombudsman report that led to an apology from the Ministry of Education in the same year.[18] The ham-fisted approach from the Ministry of Education toward school closures and amalgamations in post-earthquake Canterbury was evident of a lack of understanding of the importance of schools to community resilience. A question to be asked of the Ministry's response to Cyclone Gabrielle is precisely how much they learned from the Canterbury experience. Although it may be too early to draw conclusions, the experience of Eskdale School, discussed as a case study below, suggests that such learning may be limited.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WHAT WE FOUND

Although the sample for this research was small, the conversations were rich, and several themes emerged. These themes are organised as such below:

1. **The impact on the community**
2. **Cyclone-related learning needs**
3. **Educators as quiet heroes**
4. **Schools as hubs, schools as communities**
5. **Workload impacts**
6. **Staffing**

Most of the following text is directly quoted from interviews, with only brief commentary to add context and summarise themes across many conversations. These themes are all interconnected and they were mentioned by many, and often most, participants.

The impact on the community

The impact of the cyclone on the wider community was immense. Anyone who has seen the media coverage of the event is familiar with the destruction. Many participants spoke of the huge trauma and loss of homes and livelihoods suffered by school whānau.

I think we had we had six families that lost their homes, or their homes were severely damaged enough to have to totally evacuate. – Centre manager

We had a number of families rescued from rooftops. Some were rescued from inside the roof, from boats. One of the things I think of is that some of them were sitting on the roof when they got the alert from Civil Defence where you need to evacuate. Yeah, too late then. They've been sitting on the roof, you know, goodness knows how long. – Principal 5

It was just chaos, there were still people on their roofs that you could see, just across the paddock. There were just, you know, big trees... the paddocks look better now because it's been cleared, but it did look like a bomb had gone off. Yeah. Big trees with their roots just strewn across the highway and all around the two houses that used to be on the corner, they've been taken down now. But yeah, it was a pretty scary sight for a while. – Teacher 2

Having the cyclone hit in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis meant financial pain was felt particularly hard by communities. Food and fuel prices were already high before the cyclone and the disruption increased costs significantly. Fuelling generators for weeks, as well as increased commute times, meant spending on petrol went up. Participants spoke of families having to rent as well as make mortgage payments. Schools were cognisant of this.

That has impacted our fundraising and things here because we can't be asking our families for money at the moment when they've got their own things to worry about. Or like, school working bees, you feel guilty asking for help to tidy up this when people have got their own properties they need to be sorting out. – Principal 3

Obviously, we're still dealing with a whole lot of emotional and financial issues because it was financially a tough time for people as well. You know a lot of people couldn't go to work and then we had all the extra expenses of running generators, and extra food when you didn't have power or different food and just being out of routine. It was tough for people without children, I can only imagine what it be like for our families with little kids. Yeah, it would be really, really tough.
– Centre manager

To not have lost anybody in our school community was a miracle. So, on one hand I'm shattered, exhausted, depleted, and on the other hand I'm trying to give myself the little pep talk, you know? 'Look, you've got an amazing community. The parents are amazing. The staff are amazing. Senior management's looking after you. We didn't lose anybody'. You know, sort of the whole time, there's this little battle of the voices. Yeah, it was hard. – Teacher 4

Left: Items donated by the community fill the room at Puketapu School.

Cyclone-related learning needs

There was an acute recognition among participants about the impact the event was having on the mental health and wellbeing of students and their whānau. Most participants recounted heightened levels of anxiety, especially when the weather got bad. It is important to recognise that this comes in a context where schools are already experiencing increases in students presenting with additional and complex needs, as well as the mental health and wellbeing impacts of the pandemic.

> ***Just talking about health and wellbeing was something quite big and I think lots of learning on the agenda here for education is that that's the cycle, because parents are heightened and every time it rains, it's heightened. Or every time the helicopter now goes past, it's heightened. What happens is that parents are anxious, they never stop talking about their situation, because they don't know answers and the kids pick up on it. Then you've got anxious kids. We've got a few kids who had to swim out of the window, to swim up so that they could get on the roof, and then the water was still coming up, and it's dark, and they jump off the roof into the water to aim for the tree, and then they're stuck in the tree for two or three hours before they manage to swim to the loft that's in their barn where they're holed up until the helicopter comes and picks them up. These are the stories that some of the kids have. You can imagine that those kids are showing uncharacteristic behaviours. And I don't have the support for them because it's only just starting to come out now, and all the support comes up front. So, you know, [we had] mental health services, all sorts, in week 3,4,5, in fact probably for the first term. But it's only now that kids are starting to tell their stories.*** – Principal 1

> ***Prior to the cyclone, I had six kids referred to a counsellor, a counsellor that we employ as a part of our Kāhui Ako across eight schools. I've now got 22 kids in need of a counsellor. But I don't have a counsellor other than the same one who can do a day a week, an afternoon a week.***
> – Principal 1

> ***I think people expected everything to go back to normal and I have to say, we've gone back to normal relatively quickly as far as providing a very consistent programme, but we still have children who are anxious. And we still have parents that are. But the parents, to be honest, I don't think some of them realise that they are. It is quite tricky because you know they'll come in and some of them will be just a little bit off with us. It's like the little things, some little things might irritate them.*** – Principal 7

What we noticed was the kids started getting anxious as soon as the weather changed. As soon as there was rain, they would worry about 'will I be able to get home? Will I be stuck at school? Will I be able to see my mum again?'
– Principal 6

When they first started returning there was quite a lot of trauma for the children and for the families. We managed to work with a team from the hospital and they were able to send out some counsellors to work alongside the kids, and they continued that for the whole of term one. They sent someone out a couple of days a week, and that was really beneficial for those kids that had really experienced the trauma of things. I guess once we moved back to school and things started, you know, kids started to settle back to normal. But the reality is that every time there was a heavy rain storm the look on the kids' faces said it all. – Principal 5

How long is it going to be for our kids before they're OK when it starts raining? You know, as an adult, I don't have trauma around that, but I think anyone who's been through a severe disaster, like some of our kids, where they were literally stuck at home and they didn't have a driveway anymore. How long and what's that effect going to be on us as teachers having to deal with that as a long term process? It's a lot to think about. – Principal 6

For one principal, information about counselling services was not forthcoming from the Ministry of Education and was only provided after they 'started jumping up and down'.

No one approached me about wellbeing. No one approached me about counselling for the kids. No one said anything.
– Principal 6

We were able to access that [counselling], but only after I started jumping up and down and said 'Well hello, we're here!' No one's reaching out and saying, hey, what resources do you need? We have to kind of yell and scream and kick and carry on before they go, 'Oh yeah, that's right, they're over there'. – Principal 6

Left: Support dog at Puketapu School.

Educators as quiet heroes

Despite their own lives being impacted by the cyclone, participants reported a keen sense of wanting to support their communities, reflecting Mutch's work on teachers as 'quiet heroes' in disaster responses. For principals, getting the school open was seen as crucial to helping restore a sense of normality for tamariki and allowing whānau to continue to work and contribute toward recovery efforts. Several participants crossed rivers to access their schools, some daily for several weeks as roads and bridges were being repaired or rebuilt. While participants were humble about the support they offered their communities, their efforts were impressive and heroic. One rural principal, when discovering the road to access their remote school was closed, decided to make a 12-hour drive 'the long way round' through the only roads open in order to access their school. Ordinarily the drive took an hour and a half.

> ***And it took a week for us to get back. I said to my husband, 'We need to get back. We need to get back into school and see what's gone on.' And we knew our house, the schoolhouse, was okay because people were checking on it. And so yeah, we drove the long way round.*** **– Principal 2**

Others found ways to cross rivers when bridges had been washed out.

> ***That's when I found out there was a little boat going. And that's when I started talking to everyone, and they said, 'Well, if you can get across on the boat, we can pick you up on our side'. That's when I started thinking, 'If I can get across, I need to come and assess the school. I need to come and see what we need up here. If we can get in here, I can open the school because if the school's OK, we can open it'. By the following Wednesday, I caught the boat. They got me across. I got picked up on this end. I came up here, and the school was fine.*** **– Principal 6**

One teacher spent a whole term teaching two days a week from a makeshift classroom in a remote farm kitchen with a small group of five ākonga who were dropped off on four-wheel motorcycles from surrounding farms. It was critical support for these isolated ākonga and their whānau and proved to be an important learning opportunity.

> ***I think it was huge, I'd go up and start my day up there at 9:30am, and I'd finish at 1:30pm. We'd have a quick morning tea break and run around but it was pretty focused learning, so probably nearly a week of work in those two days that they'd [the children] get in the classroom. It was really intense. I think for them it was huge just to have that connection with school. Yeah, that feeling that they were being cared for and looked after. And for the parents as well. It gave them a few hours just to do what they had to do without some of their children. I think from a health point of view, yeah, pretty huge for them.*** **– Teacher 3**

For this teacher, although the effort involved with teaching off site was 'very exhausting', the support they were able to offer ākonga in a small group setting was 'amazing':

> ***Oh, it was amazing. It was great to be able to give them that one-on-one they needed. They got some pretty good teacher quality time, I think, yeah. It was good to be able to try bridge that gap between what's going on at home and the children you know need some support going further with home and school and... Yeah. Were able to organise that as well just to get some extra support for the family. [Principal] was amazing how he really wanted to make sure they weren't left and forgotten about because they'd actually gone through a lot of trauma and seen a lot of stress in their own environments.*** – Teacher 3

Similar to the above example, this centre manager coordinated home care arrangements for the families of their students when they were unable to access their flood impacted centre:

> ***We didn't stay home for long. We knew we had families with lots of essential workers, teachers, doctors, nurses; they all needed to get back to work. So pretty much as soon as Hawke's Bay had power on, we thought, 'What can we do?' Yeah, the teachers didn't want to sit at home and do nothing either, not when we knew we had so many people who needed help. I think there was a big community focus on getting Hawke's Bay back up and running as soon as possible and our teachers were very much of that mindset as well. What can we do?*** – Centre manager

> ***We started to sort of try and think outside the square and thought – well, maybe we could help them in their home. And so, we did it there for three weeks. Teachers were deployed out... I think at one point we ended up with six houses. I'd approach some of our families that I knew would be open to it, and the ones that were most desperate for help, about whether we could come there and then take on some additional children that also really needed care. A lot of our families don't have extended family support, and that's different now with grandparents still working, they're not able to help. So, we ended up with five or six children at each house.***
> – Centre manager

Schools as hubs, schools as communities

As discussed above, a key theme in existing research on schools in disaster settings is that schools become hubs for their communities in times of disaster. This reflects the central place schools have in their communities. A sense of connection and duty to the community was present in all interviews conducted for this research.

My overall perspective is that schools, particularly rural schools, are at the centre of the community. Therefore, that's where people will flock to in times of need. So therefore, the role of the principal is to be ready to be the leader of that community and that's not just your school community, not just your parents, but everybody within the community. – Principal 1

I firmly believe if there is no school, there's no community. It's not possible. And I absolutely could be wrong, of course, but there's so much potential for schools to have such a key role in communities, whether it's a natural disaster or not. I just wish people would care more about schools. – Teacher 1

The cleanup for the school; it was a big community effort. We're lucky we live in a small community because everybody came home. Everybody came in to help; all taiwhenua and everyone just pushed on and cleaned up everything. And we were so lucky that we were able to. With the school we got so much help just one day, one weekend, it [the mess] was gone. – Teacher aide

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, there was a recognition of the impact it would have on the community and on the important role educators can play in supporting the response.

I guess for me the main thing was – when do I open school? When is it the appropriate time to open school? Nothing was wrong with school, we just didn't have any power. The reason for [opening the school] was so the parents could get their kids back to school to some normality. It was for learning as well, but it was more just for normality. So those parents and families had time to go and deal with the issues on their farms because they had big issues. I probably don't need to tell you what they were dealing with. If it was one less thing to worry about their children from, you know, 9:00am to 2:30pm... So, I got school opened up. That was my main job when I came back, just getting school open for those people that needed it, for their kids, and just to get normality back for them. – Principal 2

You've got to be really careful how you do offer that help. Because people think that they'll just keep trooping on, and it's great while they can. But you can almost guarantee that there will be a time where they're just gonna hit the wall. Honestly, I can see it with a few parents. When we were cut off, it was like a blinking airport with the helicopters and that. Probably every 10 days we had a team come in who were social services, mental health. Then we had usually a doctor and a nurse. And then we always had somebody from the Council, and then we would have somebody from MPI [Ministry for Primary Industries] or the rural farming sector and they would come up and they would set up their little stations. And then it was drop-in sessions for anybody that wanted to come in. Those were quite valuable actually. I was really quite surprised at the amount of adults that actually went and saw the mental health people, which was very good. But the thing is then they stopped. – Principal 7

We set up tea and coffee and biscuits and said to anybody, 'Just drop in, you don't have to come and get supplies, but if you wanna drop in and have a cuppa and have a chat, you can read with the kids, you can wander around, you can do whatever you want but this space is for you'. I could not believe the amount of grown men that came in and broke down, and it was simply because they hadn't had anybody to talk to, they had just kept on going. – Principal 7

Another well-established theme in the existing research on schools in disaster setting is that the job of a principal becomes more complex as they are called on to provide community leadership and coordinate local responses. This was true of the principals spoken to for this research. Principals supported not only their schools and school whānau, but their entire communities. Many were running emergency hubs from their schools, for example by coordinating supply drops from helicopters landing on the school field.

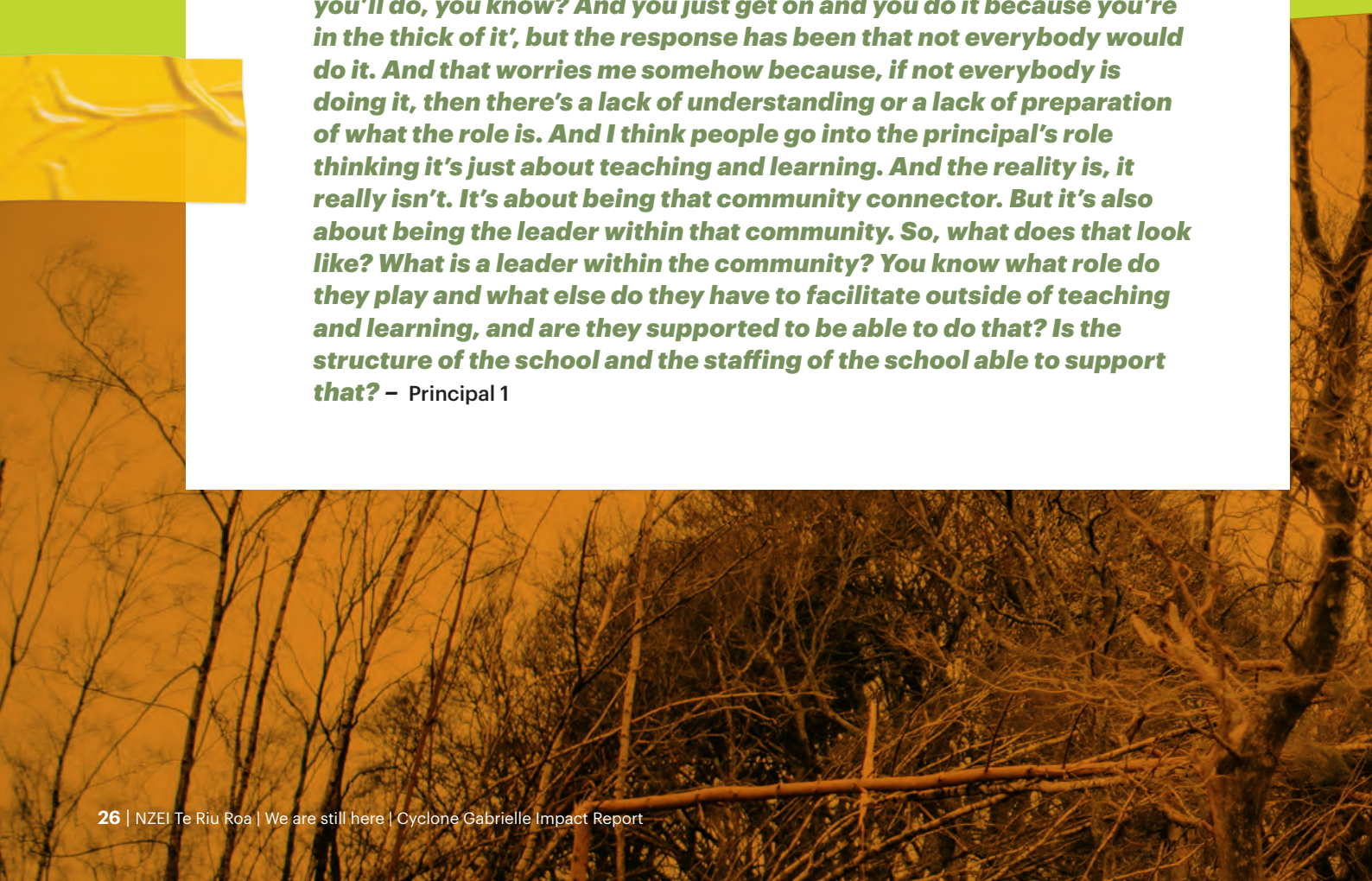
The principal will always attract that attention, and it's recognising what your role is or what you can do, because people will be looking towards you for leadership. And then it's about brokering every person that you can, to try and bring about some sort of help or support for those who are in need and affected. – Principal 1

I'm the school principal. I run the school. It's my job. And I knew that that's what my community would want; to get school going if they could access it. And for me, I thought that takes the pressure off those families having to worry about their kids, so they can get out and do what they needed to do. – Principal 2

I was here 24/7. I stayed over at the schoolhouse, but believe me, I was here till 8:30 at night and I was back at 6:00 in the morning. The one thing that I noticed was that the people that were running the hub before I came, they'd have it open an hour in the morning and an hour in the afternoon and you've got all these people that are trying so hard to get their farms sorted, how on earth can they just come in within that hour? So, I just said to them, 'Look, I'm an early riser, I'm going to come over. I'll be here at six. I'll be gone by 7:30 [pm]'. But usually, I was here till 8:30pm and I said, 'If you need something, you come in when you come in'. And people said, 'Oh, you know they should be allocated a time'. So, I said 'No, they're working. It's not like they're sitting at home doing nothing'. And so that for me was very good for the community, because it meant more people were able to access the support that we had here. Yeah, which was good. And you know, people will say 'You shouldn't have been so long', and I just said, 'Well, I had nowhere to go'. You know, I'm not like a person that sits down and watches TV so I may as well be over here doing stuff. Yeah, I mean it just it made sense. – Principal 7

As previous research has found, such contributions often go unrecognised and unsupported. This principal worried about the lack of opportunities principals are given to prepare for such responsibilities:

Look, everyone I've spoken to has said, 'Oh it's just something that you'll do, you know? And you just get on and you do it because you're in the thick of it', but the response has been that not everybody would do it. And that worries me somehow because, if not everybody is doing it, then there's a lack of understanding or a lack of preparation of what the role is. And I think people go into the principal's role thinking it's just about teaching and learning. And the reality is, it really isn't. It's about being that community connector. But it's also about being the leader within that community. So, what does that look like? What is a leader within the community? You know what role do they play and what else do they have to facilitate outside of teaching and learning, and are they supported to be able to do that? Is the structure of the school and the staffing of the school able to support that? – Principal 1



In some cases, a sense of community was found through local teachers and principals' associations and the participants' union, NZEI Te Riu Roa. In the week following the flood, meetings for principals were held in Napier and Hastings, present at which were local Ministry officials. Principals were able to link up with them, ascertain what was needed to assess their schools, and get things up and running. In the months following, principals' associations and NZEI Te Riu Roa supported educators with wellbeing days and ongoing support. NZEI Te Riu Roa Central East Area Council set up 'Te Rōpū Manaaki'; a volunteer group created to coordinate and distribute donations to union members impacted by the flooding. Its aim was, in the words of one participant, to *'provide direct, meaningful support for our members'* (Teacher 1).

Many were overwhelmed by the support and sense of community that accompanied the immediate response. This teacher aide characterised it as a 'silver lining' that contrasted the cloud of the cyclone.

> ***But gosh what's come out of it? It's so wonderful what people do for people, eh. It's just a silver lining. It's a blessing because we've all got together, the communities back together. You know, our hapū, we always used to think we're going on our own little waka, but now? All together now. It's a blessing, a real blessing in disguise that this had to happen.*** **– Teacher aide**

Workload impacts

One of the strongest themes in interviews was the massive increase in workload the cyclone created. Small school principals are known to wear many hats in their roles: principal, teacher, administrator, accountant, caretaker... In part due to their role as community leaders, principal and teacher workloads increased after the cyclone.

> ***You end up being a caretaker. Sometimes you end up looking after the school; property would be probably the hardest thing to deal with in this job over the five years. I've had a rebuild of a classroom. I've got another project starting soon. The [building project], that's still something on going. It's taking a long time to wind up and it takes a lot of time sending emails, chasing up people – and I'm not even the project manager – just to make sure that your school gets what it deserves. If there was something, I don't know what you could do to make that property portfolio a bit easier like the board and myself, we'd still want input into what happens in your school, but it would be great if people could just walk in and do their bloody job and walk out and leave the school, instead of me having to chase up, 'Can you come back and fix this?' All those unexpected things like the water testing that's gone up [in frequency] every month.*** – Principal 2

> ***You go to a community meeting at 7:00 at night and you're there till 9:30-10.00pm sorting out that thing, and emails popping up all to do with that. So, you're here, but you're also involved in all community stuff too, because you're a leader of the school. The school plays a big part here. I don't know what support would... I mean it's actually just staffing. It's getting us fully released, or it's also dropping the workload to get rid of the unnecessary stuff.*** – Principal 3

> ***And you know, my kids are starting to say to me, 'Mum, you're over at school all the time' ... And I'll run myself ragged during the week so I can get to their meetings at night or whatever. I still make time for them, but I still put just as much time into this job, and you know, you get yourself sick and run down and all of those things. So, I try to find a balance, but it is hard and then, you know, there's some ridiculous stuff I think that we have to do as principals, some of the paper that comes through that all adds on to the workload, some of it's... I think it's just ridiculous. I have to sometimes say to myself, is that going to help my children here at the school? No? Delete.***
> – Principal 2

I started putting on lunches for the kids every day. We also had a lot of frozen pies donated, so we gave the kids free pies on a Tuesday and Thursday, and Monday, Wednesday, Friday we made lunches., We had spaghetti bolognaise, macaroni cheese... All that sort of stuff, just to try and ease the load on the parents. But I would bring those in on the weekends. – Principal 6

One principal had been distributing mail to isolated community members where the post could not reach:

Look, it was just exhausting, it was just a pain. To go and get groceries you had to really think about it. We've got to get all this stuff from that side of the river to the other side, you take washing baskets, so you didn't have all these bags, because there was only two of you to bring stuff back. I ended up taking the mail from here over to the other side of the river. Our mail used to be every day, or six days a week. Now it's three or four days a week because [it's difficult] for the mailman to come right around... so yeah, I'm still doing drops up our road.
– Principal 3

Many raised concerns about the impacts such high workloads were having and questioned whether they were sustainable.

They're [the Ministry] running the risk of losing these people. I had a friend that's just picked up a principal job, same age as me and that's hard as well. You're a young female, gone into one of these roles where it's hard for anyone, but it takes a long time to get the respect of people... I said to my friend, 'I wouldn't recommend. Love it, but probably wouldn't recommend it'. – Principal 3

It's hard... I feel like this job isn't sustainable. I just feel like that Ministry higher up aren't actually taking it seriously.
– Principal 3

I know that sounds very doom and gloom, but I do love my job and I love my community. I love being the leader in the community and I love doing cool stuff with the kids and all of that. But at some point, something's gotta give.
– Principal 3

Left: Lessons carried on in temporary shelters at Eskdale School.

You come back [from a break] and you still come back to, sorry, some of the same shit that you've still got to deal with and get through. There have been times that I have wanted to chuck it in, but then you settle down and you think, 'Yeah, I can do this and I'm not ready to leave yet'. But, you know, my poor husband cops it in the end, or my family cops it in the end. – Principal 2

That first term, while it was good that we were in there, it was really hard work and I remember going home at the end of the day and just not wanting to talk to anyone, just having run out of words really and energy. I stopped going to the gym, I stopped doing all those things cause I was just emotionally shattered, which meant that I felt physically shattered too, so that that first term was really hard. – Teacher 4

You know the initial time when adrenaline kicks in and you just keep going and that was very much the case when it first happened. But then you've got your three-month mark and your six-month mark, and I know on a personal level for me what I'm really worried about is, yes, I've been going since the start of the year, but when am I gonna have my breaking point? At which point am I not going to be able to get out of bed that morning and go, 'You know what? I can't anymore'...? Because you will get to that point. It's part of the process... everyone has their own kind of timeline as to where that point is, but there also has to be a time when you know, boom, this is it. And I'm very worried about that. I'm worried about what the implications will be when that happens. – Principal 6

One participant summarised their concerns with people leaving the profession as coming down to a question of time.

Crossing rivers on a boat to get to the other side, that's happened up here... That's happened in Gisborne... What are some other ones...? You know, people teaching a week after they've just lost their home. That does worry me, the amount I've already seen just in my area that have dropped out of education. It is a scary thought and I think the fact that we did get a pay raise for primary teachers is great but what teachers want is the most valuable thing anybody can offer, and is a key part of life, and this is time. Teachers want time to be able to sit and educate their children and having a teacher aide in every classroom you can do that. People just want time. – Teacher 1

Staffing

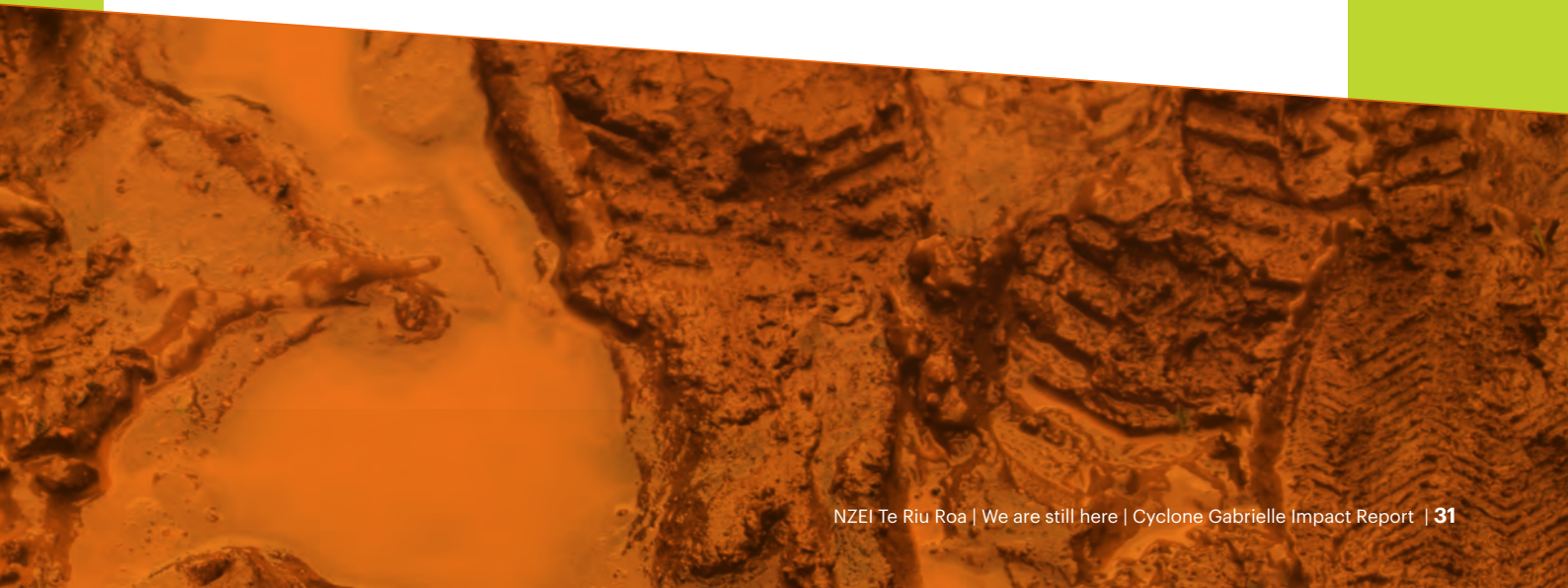
As we have seen, educator workloads are ordinarily very high, and a disaster only adds to this. In recognition of this the Ministry of Education granted affected schools additional staffing to help cope with the additional workload pressure. For many participants, this was critical and timely support. It allowed some small school principals to be fully released which helped them cope with the additional workload. In larger schools it meant extra release time in support of staff wellbeing.

> ***They [the Ministry] were great. They said, right, we're gonna get this done. They gave me additional release, which was just the saving grace, and I didn't even know that was coming. I just got a call and 'Hey, we've just upped your staffing, you can fully employ another teacher'. And I said, 'What? Am I hearing this right?' and they were like, 'From now you need to be out of the classroom'. That was the best possible thing that could have happened. To be honest, I probably wouldn't still be sitting here if they hadn't. I would have burnt out well before already. Still feeling pretty exhausted, but that has definitely helped.*** – Principal 3

> ***I've gotta take my hat off to them, where during the initial cyclone response I was really impressed by the support we received from the Ministry, in terms of additional funding, in terms of additional staffing so that we could enable some of our staff to have some wellbeing days. Yeah, and things like that to try and keep the energy levels up, because it was draining.*** – Principal 5

The additional staffing was only provided until the end of 2023, causing anxiety for principals about what happens when it ends, recognising that the cyclone's impacts extend well beyond 2023. The level of displacement in the area made roll numbers uncertain and surplus staffing situations seemed on the horizon.

> ***The other thing we're also thinking now is, are we going to lose a teacher for next year? Because we're also talking about our roll, we're losing a lot of kids at the end of the year. But on top of what we're dealing with now, is that the best thing for us to lose a teacher next year?*** – Principal 6



CASE STUDIES

During this research every step was taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Two of the schools interviewed, however, had stories so unique and widely publicised at the time that it would be nearly impossible to ensure this. Their stories had already received media attention, and they were happy to be named in this report. The stories here of Omahu School and Eskdale School are not presented to draw contrast. They do, however, stand as examples of the more general themes considered above, and as a testament to the incredible work these schools have done.

Photo: ©Stuff

Omahu School

According to the Ministry of Education, Omahu school was the worst affected school in the region. Situated northwest of Hastings, less than 500m north of the Ngaruroro River that breached its banks on 14 February, Omahu is a small school with a long and proud history. Nearly all the staff and students are Māori, and the school has deep links into the local community. A few current students can claim to be the fourth or even fifth generation in their whānau to attend the school. Alongside the local marae just down the road, Omahu school plays a crucial role in connecting the community and providing continuity across generations. The school is set to celebrate its 125th anniversary in 2024.

Damage to the school caused by the flooding necessitates a complete rebuild, with only part of the original library able to be salvaged. Faced with an unusable school and a major rebuild project, the students and staff of Omahu were invited to use the hall of nearby Irongate school until the rebuild is completed. For a school so severely impacted by the cyclone, the resilience and resolve of the staff and students is impressive. A $20,000 grant from the Ministry of Education, a host of generous donations from around the motu and beyond, and the manaaki of their Irongate hosts, got them going again, but they were starting 'from nothing'.

Six months on and the staff and community have turned the Irongate hall into a dynamic and colourful open learning space. It is far from ideal, and it's not their school, but stepping into the space feels like stepping into a classroom, with various learning zones set up, resources tidily displayed, and ākonga artwork all over the walls. Perhaps the most astonishing thing about Omahu school is the ability of (now former) principal Te Kewena White and the Omahu staff to turn the whole experience into a learning opportunity for ākonga. Every aspect of their response is considered in terms of how it can support teaching and learning. This is reflected in an early request made by White to the Ministry of Education to have local tradespeople involved in the school rebuild so that the process provided positive role models for the students.

> ***One student, he said, 'I want to be a carpenter'. I said, 'Why?', 'Because my uncle's a carpenter, and he's going to come and rebuild the school'. So, there it is right there. And when I had this conversation, I said, 'Cool, well this is what you now need. So, when I say eyes down, I mean eyes down, or I'll be telling your uncle' [Laughs...]***

White is not from Omahu but sees this as a strength, giving him the space to take his role seriously in supporting students to build skills for their future careers, and equipping them as Māori to have influence in their communities.

Omahu's students were severely impacted by the flooding, losing homes and pets, with many displaced for months. Recognising the impact this had on the ākonga, the school organised for a local art therapist to come and work with the children to do art therapy with traditional art forms, drawing and weaving. White says the impact has been 'exciting' and the tamariki have taken to it, the evidence of which is on display throughout the Irongate hall.

Former principal of Omahu school Te Kewena White and Irongate School principal Maurice Rehu stand with students.

Right: Omahu School's temporary learning space set up in Irongate School hall.


Kam Na Mauri
Kia Orana
Bula Vinaka
Aloha
Kia Ora

Eskdale School

Eskdale School sits on an elevated site at the bottom of the Esk Hills, facing northwards with views across the Esk Valley. When the Esk river broke its banks in the early hours of 14 February, the flooding managed to reach the school's lower field. Principal Tristan Cheer describes the immediate days after the cyclone

We are high, and so people are sort of coming out of the water up into the school, so it didn't make it to our car park or our any of our buildings or anything like that. But that bottom school field was certainly covered. When I got to school, which was two days later, it would have had half a metre of silt on most of the field. So, it became apparent straight away we weren't going to be getting back to school anytime soon, especially because the civic system, the water and the power were out. And really, a big concern was, you know, had we lost any families? We had the USAR team here, the urban search and rescue guys, and they based themselves in the school hall. And so, I spoke with them, and they were like, this was Friday, they were... you know, they were searching not for people, but for bodies. So, you sort of thought, gee, how many families or kids have we lost here, because seeing the devastation and knowing how many were getting rescued out of roofs, out of ceiling spaces... It's a miracle there were not more lives lost. Absolute miracle. And certainly, a miracle we didn't lose any of our children from school, or any direct family members of those children.

Above: Eskdale School temporary classroom.

Looking north across the valley from the lower block of the school it is hard to imagine it all under water, but indeed for those who witnessed it, 'The whole valley was an ocean' (Teacher 2). Apart from the damage to the field, the school was otherwise left unscathed. The school and its catchment area, however, were deemed by the council to be 'category 3', meaning that the property was seen to be unsafe due to 'the unacceptable risk of future flooding and loss of life'.[19] This saw the school closed for the remainder of term one. The school set up a makeshift facility at the local domain sports rooms and resumed teaching in week five, just two weeks after the event.

In June, the Ministry of Education was informed of the categorisation of Eskdale School into category three and decided to 'pause' a major building project. According to a response from an Official Information Act request submitted to the Ministry of Education, this pause was to 'allow time for parties to understand the impact of local authority decisions on the school's catchment area and the impact on predicted future roll growth'.[20] With foundations already in, the building project was at that point well underway. In an echo of the mishandling of school closures following the Canterbury earthquakes, this put additional pressure on a school already struggling with the aftermath of a disaster.

The 'pause' came as a shock to the school and board. Their existing classrooms were well overdue for an upgrade, and a growing roll meant space was tight. While the Ministry OIA response paints the decision as justified, this is not how it was experienced by the school who felt they were given no reason. Cheer, alongside the school board and with the support of the wider community, launched an advocacy campaign aimed at saving the building project. Drawing on whatever social capital they had to draw attention to their cause, the school contacted local media and made posts on social media using the hashtag '#wearestillhere'. The board reached out to politicians, inviting both the 'red team' and the 'blue team' to visit the school and hear their story. While their campaign was ultimately successful it required huge effort for something that could have been avoided from the beginning.

> ***You know, this is something that could have been controlled. It wasn't a natural disaster. This is a decision made by someone, somewhere, for whatever reason. To have to take up a fight with the very people who should be supporting the school and the very people who earlier in the cyclone were standing with us and beside us and behind us... but now they're standing in front of us, you know, it really took its toll mentally, physically as well.***
>
> ***We got there, but that was a lot of effort and stress on top of what had already been an unbelievable six months.***

RECOMMEND-ATIONS

Participants were asked what their main learning was from the cyclone, what they might have done differently were it to happen again, and what advice they may offer other educators or the Ministry of Education to improve disaster responses and support schools in their role as community connectors and hubs. Previous research into the role of schools in disasters has also produced recommendations, most of which have been ignored by successive governments.[21] The following recommendations are based on both sets of recommendations. Participant quotes are included to give voice to those involved in this study who shared their recommendations.

1. Recognition of the distinct role schools play in disaster responses, and resourcing for support

Researchers have been calling for schools to be recognised for the role they play in disaster responses since at least the Canterbury earthquakes. Unfortunately, this seems to have been largely ignored by the Ministry of Education and central and local government disaster response agencies, and little meaningful change has been made. The first recommendation is to acknowledge that schools will often play this role by default. This needs to be accompanied by suitable resourcing and professional development.

> ***The thinking needs to be, how do we provide support for schools to really be able to support the community? Which is about getting school up and running and about being having a team ready to go.*** – Principal 5

2. Recognition of the role ECE centres play in disaster responses as being equal to that of schools, and resource them appropriately

Despite serving a similar function as schools in supporting their community through the recovery process, ECE centres do not get the same level of support from the Ministry of Education. For example, unlike schools, ECE centres received no extra staffing support. This needs to change as there is no reason for ECE centres to receive less support than schools.

> ***I think maybe [ECE] is a little bit underestimated as far as you need to have it for your community to function, you know, if you've got teachers and doctors and nurses... ECE is essential. Otherwise it all just comes to a grinding halt.***
> – Centre manager

3. System level support, resourcing and planning for climate related disasters

Participants unanimously felt it was a matter of if, and not when, further disaster events would occur. While the Ministry response to Gabrielle was in many ways commendable, it was reactive, inconsistent, and there is nothing to prevent future responses from being limited by government decisions such as fiscal restraint. As such, at risk schools should have access to dedicated funding for emergency equipment. A permanent climate team needs to be set up within the Ministry and tasked with providing pre-disaster support, education and risk mitigation, support during a disaster that is cognisant of extended disaster timelines, and post-disaster support for schools through the 'long tail' of disaster recovery. Climate change risk needs to be embedded in a consistent way across Ministry property decisions that consider both short, medium and long-term climate projections, including sea level rise, as well as the needs of communities in disaster responses, in particular rural communities and those where schools are most likely to become hubs in disasters.

4. Communications and energy security

Nearly every participant mentioned the importance of satellite internet connections and the availability of electricity generators to their response. Most did not already have these, which slowed the process of reopening schools. When schools did get power and satellite internet up and running, they became critical lifelines for entire communities many of whom were still without power or communications. If schools are default community hubs in disasters, then they need to be resourced with the right equipment to do this.

> ***Two things that I would say to have in place or to have in rural communities like this would be [satellite internet], that people can just plug in to generator and use and having a big generator for the community.*** – Principal 2

> ***The expectation of the authorities that people can access information via internet, it's just very unrealistic. Everybody's network was down. People's laptops were washed away, people had moved to new places where their internet was not accessible. Yeah, information was being pushed out online and it was... it's seen as a way of communication, you know, and for the elderly, there's no way. In the face of their house being covered with silt, were they going to jump on the internet and try and sort their way through pages and pages of links?*** – Principal 1

> ***What else happened? Bath sanitation. Once we got power back in school... after five days we had a generator up and running, so that meant that we got running water back. Which meant that we could use the toilets. Which was the precursor to opening school because I wasn't going to open school unless I could open the toilet. And then they became the ablutions for the community, they still didn't have running water. And we got our local to build some showers. We had four showers so, for all of term one – that's, what, 8 weeks – the showers were being used by people in the community as well, that's solar showers.***
> – Principal 1

Generators, absolutely, I would say are essential, but then with all these things, you've also got to have somebody that's got to take on that role [of maintaining them]. Schools already have so much on. – Teacher 1

We got a bigger generator from the Council. So we had a few people coming down having showers. We only have one shower. But you know, there were just a few people that couldn't have one at their home. And then obviously we had all the supplies here. So that was good. – Principal 7

5. Extension of additional staffing for at least a further 12 months, additional curriculum staffing in primary schools to support education and pastoral care

As discussed above, the additional staffing provided to schools was a godsend, however it was only guaranteed until the end of 2023, while the impacts of the cyclone will continue for many years yet. Additional staffing needs to be extended for at least another 12 months in recognition of the slow recovery process and ongoing work this creates. Several reports over the past few years have pointed to the inadequacy of current primary school staffing levels and unjustified inequities in curriculum and management staffing between primary and secondary schools.[22] These inequities in staffing levels need to be addressed as a matter of urgency in support of both ordinary education as well as the increased needs of students as a result of natural disasters and the pandemic.

We were given some extra staffing from the Ministry for this year, which has been fantastic. I've just given extra release time to the teachers, just used it that way and will do to the end of the year because they're dealing with increased stresses within the classroom as well. But I don't think the impact of the cyclone will be over by December, and so, I think there needs to be a continuation of that increase in staffing. At least 24 months past the event, whatever that might be, and you can look at Christchurch as an example of that, and now Gabrielle is another example of that. Because I'm drawn away on lots of other things. – Principal 1

6. Ongoing mental-health and wellbeing support for ākonga and school staff

There has been widespread recognition of the mental health and wellbeing crisis schools are currently facing and the need to address this with robust in-school support. While mental health support was forthcoming in term one, it began to dry up after this and regardless, a general lack of councillors meant that even if the funding was available, support wasn't always accessible. There was a sense that the Ministry of Education did not understand the longer-term impact the cyclone will have on mental health and wellbeing. Moreover, it wasn't always clear to schools that supports were available. The Ministry needs to take a proactive approach to letting schools know such resourcing is available.

A positive development since this research was conducted was the funding announced in Budget 2023 for mental wellbeing support for primary and intermediate school aged students through the expansion of the Mana Ake – Stronger for Tomorrow programme into Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti.[23] This programme needs to be continued at the same time as mental health supports are built into ordinary primary school resourcing. The Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce highlighted that one of the inequities in the existing staffing entitlement is the absence of staffing for counsellors in the primary sector. This was echoed by 2021 Pūaotanga review of staffing in primary schools. In order to meet the increased mental health needs of primary school students we recommend counselling be provided as a separate line in the primary staffing entitlement, as it is for secondary schools.[24]

Finally, mental health support for school staff, in particular principals, needs to be supported and resourced. Targeted post-disaster support should be included in ordinary Ministry disaster event planning. The Ministry should also consider provisioning professional supervision for principals as an ordinary part of their work.

> ***What we found the last term was the kids were wild, it was rough. The boys were just constantly physical, like our kids are physical kids and I'm used to them being physical because they're farmers. But honestly, we were seeing fighting in the playground, which is something we've never seen before.*** – Principal 6

> ***People need ongoing support because when they are eligible for counselling and they get eight sessions, that doesn't do it. You know, it seriously isn't enough. You can look at a lot of research and it'll back that up. It's the same with children that you know have a loss or a death of somebody in the family, or anybody who has a death. You can do a grief and loss program, but it doesn't stop at the end of the program. And I think that's what people need to understand.*** – Principal 7

Footnotes

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10 Mutch, 'How schools build community resilience', p.1.

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15 Cathy Wylie, *Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders*, Wellington: NZCER, 2022. **https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/Highest%20Needs%20Review.pdf**

16 Cathy Wylie, *Highest Needs Review: What matters to stakeholders*, Wellington: NZCER, 2022.

Mutch & Gawith, 'The New Zealand earthquakes'.

17 Mutch, 'How schools build community resilience', p.9.

18 **publicservice.govt.nz/news/ombudsmans-school-closures-report**

19 **Hawke's Bay Regional Council, *Land Categorisation Process and Framework following Cyclone Gabrielle September 2023*, https://www.hastingsdc.govt.nz/assets/Document-Library/Cyclone-Land-Categorisation-Documents/HBRC/1.-FINAL-HBRC-Land-Categorisation-Methodology-and-Framework.pdf**

20 OIA 1316774, 15 September, 2023. Retrieved from **education.govt.nz/our-work/information-releases/responses-to-official-information-act-requests**

21 See, for example: Mutch, 'How schools build community resilience', p.12.; Mutch, 'Schools as Communities', pp.135-136.; Mutch, 'The role of schools in disaster prepardness', pp.19-20.

22 *Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinitini Report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce*, p.113, **https://conversation.education.govt.nz/assets/TSR/Tomorrows-Schools-Review-Report-13Dec2018.PDF**;

Our Schooling Futures: Stronger Together Whiria Ngā Kura Tūātinitini Final report by the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Taskforce, p.72, **https://conversation-space.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/Tomorrows+Schools+FINAL+Report_WEB.pdf**

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Above: Eskdale School Principal Tristan Cheer stands by the halted rebuild of the school.

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