

# Young People



# Insights



EDUCATION COUNCIL  
NEW ZEALAND | Matatū Aotearoa



ThinkPlace



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# Purpose Statement

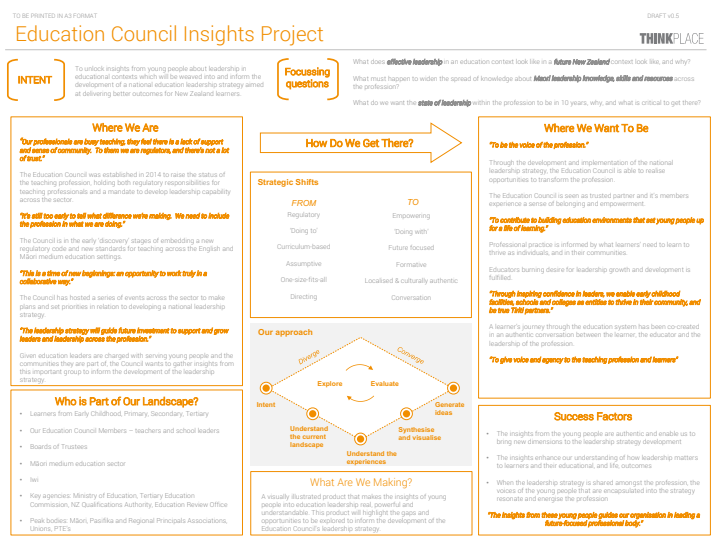
The purpose of this project was to **uncover powerful, meaningful and authentic insights** to help the Education Council to better understand the education leadership experiences of 18-24 year olds and to incorporate these insights and learnings into the development of their new leadership strategy.

## Our approach

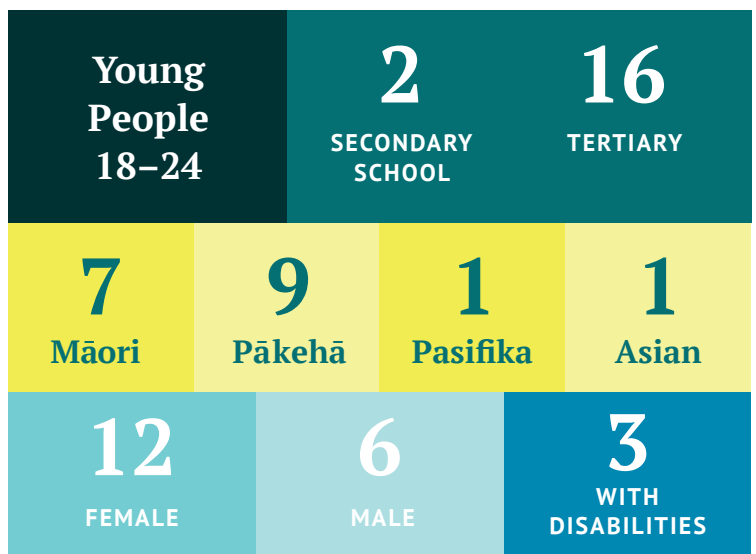
An intent session was held with several leaders from the Education Council during which we set out the scope of what we wanted to discover in particular where the Education Council is now, where it wants to be in the future, the strategic shifts that need to be made and what success looked like.

During this session the team also planned out the research approach. We agreed to interview up to 20 young people aged between 18-24 years old who lived in Wellington and Christchurch with a range of variables – female/male, Māori, Pākehā, Pasifika, other ethnicities, young people with disabilities, at work and in tertiary education.

The research process culminated into synthesis and analysis sprints spread across two days, which were undertaken by the ThinkPlace insights team. During the first day we reflected on the research process and the initial impressions of what we heard. We then analysed transcripts and formulated the emerging participant needs and drew out insightful quotes. As we progressed, we also drew out emerging themes. The second day saw us focus on creating user profiles to highlight different education leadership journeys and expectations the young people we spoke to had. We further refined the themes emerging from the interviews and talked about the opportunities emerging for the Education Council leadership strategy.



INTENT STATEMENT CREATED BY CORE DESIGN TEAM



What  
we  
|  
learned

## **Insights at a glance**



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**Education leadership is about knowing me, caring about me, enabling and empowering me**

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**I need education leaders to strike the right balance between being relatable and setting appropriate boundaries**

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**I'm needing education leaders to accommodate my differences and help me participate fully in my learning journey**

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**I need both academic learning and life learning to equip me for the real world**




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**Some of the leaders and supporters who made the biggest impact on me weren't those in dedicated leadership positions, it was often one individual who made the world of difference**

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**Creating an inclusive school community where every one of us can see ourselves reflected is what I'm looking for from education leadership**

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**For me to grow as a leader I need to be given genuine and authentic responsibility and provided the right support and training**

INSIGHT

**Education leadership is about knowing me, caring about me, enabling and empowering me.**

WHAT WE LEARNED

The words the young people used to describe what were the most important virtues of education leaders were consistent. They are looking for leaders who are relatable, empathetic, caring, genuine and passionate

Being there to guide and help students when they need assistance, and at times when they don't actually know they need help, is important

Education leaders need to take the time to know students at an individual level and understand what makes each person tick

Young people have high expectations of educators going the extra mile, with many of them commenting that they saw teaching being much more than a 9-5 job, they perceived teaching as a vocation

WHAT WE HEARD

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*“Education leaders need passion, mixed with capability, mixed with empathy.”*

“

*“It's hard to feel like you have a place. When teachers acknowledge you, it's like 'oh someone knows who I am'”.*

*“I always found with teachers that cared a lot about you, you never wanted to disappoint them because they actually had an investment in what you were doing.”*

*“So everyone who's made an impact on my learning has always been passionate about what they do, having the enthusiasm themselves for it, that kind of bubbling enthusiasm which permeates the whole class.”*

*“When you're young you've got so much going on in your head, it's nice to know that a teacher cares enough to ask you what's going on and if you're alright. It's nice to have someone in a leadership role that you know you can trust, that there's someone there for you makes a huge difference.”*

*“I want teachers to entice even those that aren't teachable. I want teachers to be the types of ambassadors where they actually go to the streets. Don't only teach between 9am-3pm, be ready for teaching at any time.”*



KEY LEADERSHIP  
ATTRIBUTES

TINO RANGATIROTANGA  
KIND PASSION GENUINE  
CARING RESPECT BELIEVE  
EMPATHY LOVE RELATABLE  
DEDICATED

*Passion*

*I want to say passion but I need a word that mixes that with capability, and then empathy is part of that capability, so it's a bit of both.*

*Respect*

*I guess no one will follow you if no one respects you, or no one will listen to you, if no one respects you either, it's a big thing.*

*Doing it for the right reasons*

*I would probably say doing things not for the recognition but because it is the right thing to do. I think that is the biggest thing for a leader – they don't want anything out of it – they just want the best for other people rather than themselves.*

*Relatability*

*If you don't relate with your students then they are not going to care about the work that provide for you. They are not going to want to succeed because they feel like you are just somebody who is put there and told what to say.*

*It's kind of the balance between being an authoritative figure but also being relatable too.*

*Relatable*

*I think that makes it easier for everyone to get along with each other. It builds respect for them as well and I think it makes their job as a leader easier.*

*Caring*

*Care and compassion are things that come to mind.*

*Kind*

*I think, you could be a really important person but if you don't give a shit about people, then it's really hard for people to respect you. You could be really important but if you don't care, it's hard to acknowledge that person.*

*Empathy*

*I would say listening or empathy. I think that a lot of people categorise leaders as being the big talker or the person who is a man and white and loud and leading the pack. Whereas I think a lot of leadership does come from listening to what people think and then kind of directing from there. I feel like the best leaders are people who can listen.*

*Tino Rangatirotanga*

*It is just everything that a leader is – the way they do things, their personality... Yeah, it is a natural thing – it is not something they are taught.*

*Love*

*I had teachers that I could kind of sense that they loved what they did, and they loved helping us students to succeed.*

*Believe*

*Starting from a baseline where you believe in the potential of everyone that you lead. People might require supports of some kind to get there, but that's just a given, believe in their potential.*

*Genuine*

*If they don't sound genuine and if they don't sound like they care, you just feel like 'shit, that's cool' and you just feel like they don't care about us and then we don't care about them.*

## INSIGHT

**I need education leaders to strike the right balance between being relatable and setting appropriate boundaries.**

### WHAT WE LEARNED

Educators need to be relatable, especially as students' progress through secondary school. Being treated like an adult, and as an equal at times, is important

The young people spoke of wanting educators to share with them aspects of their own lives and learning journeys – this helps build rapport and connection, and provides learning opportunities for students

The need for boundaries and calling students to account for inappropriate behavior was clearly understood and also appreciated in many instances

## WHAT WE HEARD

”*Many leaders don't make it known that they have gone through hardship. You can connect with people through shared hardships.*”

”*Leadership is about setting people on track, when they're not on track bringing them back on track, not just letting them get off.*”

”*My year 3 or 4 teacher was just relatable – not a friend but there was a line between it.... It was just the way they treated us. We had grown up a bit and they realised and respected that and gave us different responsibilities and made learning fun.*”

”*If you can relate to your students and you get on with them at that personal level then you form the relationship that is needed to actually learn more than just words and numbers. You actually have content and life skills as well.*”

”*He (the Principal) knew everyone's name, he knew what everyone did. But he was absolutely willing to stand in front of assembly and pull us all to heel.... he was willing to put himself offside with students which was important.*”

”*My brother had some issues with drugs and I wanted to turn that slightly negative thing into a positive thing and my teacher helped me do that from her own personal experience. They made themselves available to talk about stuff, they could see things and asked if I needed to talk.*”

## INSIGHT

**I'm needing education leaders to accommodate my differences and help me participate fully in my learning journey.**

## WHAT WE LEARNED

A 'one size fits all' approach to teaching and leadership isn't meeting many students' learning needs, they're looking for educators to be able to flex their styles and approaches

Making learning interesting and fun is also important. Several of the young people spoke about missing out on individualised support and assistance, or not being recognised for what they were proud of in themselves

Providing every student with some one-on-one time regardless of their ability is critical

The young people would have valued being able to provide feedback to their educators on their teaching and leadership styles (in an appropriate manner and forum)

For a number of the young people who had some specific physical and learning challenges, their experience in terms of being included and accommodated ranged from very little effort being made, through to some schools going the extra mile

## WHAT WE HEARD

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***“What I know you know is in your head isn't coming out on paper.”***

*[Commenting about a teacher who understood the student had a learning difficulty]*

“

*“I expected to get a sports award and I didn't which upset me a lot. It took me awhile to get over that, especially as I was a leader in sport. It affected me a lot... it took quite a bit of confidence out of me.”*

*“Some teachers were a lot less focused on the barriers, were more about making things work. These are the people I see as leading. There was a difference between people who lead and people who are in power.”*

*“Every student has some kind of need, it's just emphasised when you have physical access needs... thinking about what we could do as leaders to ensure that every student is able to participate to their full potential and reach whatever goals they have in education.”*

*“I missed out on the extracurricular things like going on trips and camps.. they always said it was going to be too difficult and there wasn't a willingness to adjust things so I could participate or look at different ways that I could be supported so I feel I missed out quite a bit.”*

*“Yes, there might be your good students and you're not so good students, and though some might seem like they don't want to be there – they've all got a path in life that they're going to take. So just trying to help shape that pathway for each individual rather than what the school wants.”*

INSIGHT

**I need both academic learning and life learning to equip me for the real world.!!**

WHAT WE LEARNED

The young people felt students would benefit from more focus on developing the life skills and leadership skills that are needed in day-to-day adult life

The importance and value of leaders in students' lives role modelling behaviours that help students prepare for life beyond the school environment

Educators' focus and expectation of students' academic success was seen as detrimental by several of the young people. They were looking for educators to look more broadly at where students were in their learning journey, and take a more holistic view of what's important, such as a young person's social skills, their wider interests and being actively involved with their whānau and community

Young people are looking for education leaders to help them figure out how to decide what to do once they leave school. Several commented that tertiary education isn't the only worthwhile path available to students, and more encouragement and focus should be given to helping students work out what is right for them

A particular pain point for those who were in tertiary studies was the transition from school to tertiary education – the volume and type of learning was overwhelming, as was the requirement to self-manage and navigate a very large and different system. They felt ill-prepared

WHAT WE HEARD

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*“I got stressed over thing things.... No one gave us perspective on things like exams in the big scheme of life.”*

“

*“Our Principal talked to us about spiraling up and spiraling down... it's been a useful life lesson.”*

*“I don't think my senior years of high school prepared me enough for university I didn't know what to expect, how different the learning was and didn't realise how much of the learning would be up to me.”*

*“The Service Academy was better than school. We learnt commitment, to be organised, life principles were drilled into you. They taught us to be a man with principles and values. I've incorporated these into my everyday life after school.”*

*“My teacher had this strong thing of teaching us more than we had to know. Regardless of whether we respected that or not, it's come in handy now. They taught us about the Treaty of Waitangi as it was something we needed to know. They taught us to go the extra mile.”*

*“I got pushed to go to university in Year 13 so I ended up going because I got told it was what everyone does, if you don't then then you're a loser. I'm \$27k in debt and now I'm a builder. You shouldn't be pushed into going to university, just do what you want to do.”*

## INSIGHT

**Some of the leaders and supporters who made the biggest impact on me weren't those in dedicated leadership positions, it was often one individual who made the world of difference.**

## WHAT WE LEARNED

The majority of the young people recalled one individual who made a huge difference in their learning journey. This ranged from individual teachers who supported them - focusing on ways to make learning fun and interesting or going out of their way to ensure they felt included, through to whānau who encouraged, pushed, challenged and motivated them

The value of being able to talk to an educator about a personal challenge a student is facing if they weren't able to talk about the challenge with their own family

Some young people spoke about a specific education leader who had identified a possible issue or risk that was emerging for that young person, and how they front-footed the issue or looked out for them to ensure the issue or risk was managed

## WHAT WE HEARD

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*“My parents pushed me to be independent, to be strong – the world was my oyster and I am the pearl.”*

“

*“I sucked at English when I was in Year 9, I was in the ESOL class. My teacher helped me get into a better class for the next year and then a better class the following year. Then in year 13 I got into the scholarship English class.”*

*“My teacher would give up their Sunday to open up a class for students who needed help, I thought that was love and support, no other teacher would give up their weekend to help students.”*

*“During that period in high school when things weren't so great at home, it was nice to have a bit of support and direction, even if it was just from one teacher. It was good to know that someone else knew about it and you could go and see them if you needed to.”*

*“Back then I use to be sent to the school office for thinking that I was better than everyone. My koro spoke to me in Te Reo, he gave me a growling that singed my soul. That was the last time I had the idea that I was better than anyone else. It was a good growling – it grounded me, it humbled me.”*

*“I had a teacher who just knew what I could get to and really pushed me to get there. Knowing that other people who were in higher situations thought you could get there gave you that oomph in your step.”*

## INSIGHT

Creating an **inclusive** school community where **every one** of us can see **ourselves reflected** is what I'm looking for from education leadership.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Students need to see themselves reflected in their school community, regardless of their academic abilities or any challenges they might face. For those who weren't included or didn't find a place for themselves, their journey through school was often a painful and traumatic experience

Strong, visible and decisive leadership is critical to enabling a safe and supportive culture between students. Every young person commented that they had experienced or witnessed bullying. Not tolerating any form of bullying (including what may be perceived as relatively minor) was a change young people wanted to see for future learners

Understanding that a young person's culture is integral to who they are is vital – young people are wanting educators to embrace this and weave it into the school environment

A pain point was the cultural and traditional practices that were prevalent in single sex school environments. These practices were often a mismatch to the students' own values

There is a strong desire from young people for schools to create a family-type, inclusive school environment

## WHAT WE HEARD

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*“School created a sense of community for me and steadied me.”*

“

*“Probably because we're like a big family. That's probably my favourite part of my college. I don't want to leave.”*

*“I struggled with the jocks, the sexist culture of the school and the acceptance of that culture by the education leaders.”*

*“If you're having family troubles you have family within that school and I think that's important.”*

*“Schools need to look after all the students, especially the more vulnerable students who are having a difficult time, those who aren't cared for because they don't fit.”*

*“There was a group of us who were outcasts who banded together for protection as opposed to actually having anything in common, it was more that we were the most hated in our school which was quite hard.”*

*“Culture made the difference to my success and failure.”*

## INSIGHT

**For me to grow as a leader I need to be given genuine and authentic responsibility and provided the right support and training.**

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Several of the young people had been provided with a leadership opportunity while at school. Some had aspired to this at an early age, and actively set a path to achieving this. For those who weren't successful in getting a leadership position, there was little support to help them work through the disappointment. For those who were successful, often the school didn't provide enough leadership support, they felt they were left to fend for themselves

Being identified as a leader can be an empowering moment for a young person. Students are often looking for leadership opportunities throughout their learning journey. This doesn't always need to be through formal opportunities, they're looking for small, everyday opportunities to step up and practice leadership – and to be supported and encouraged in their endeavours

The young people felt it was often those who were most popular at school who were put in to leadership positions (or were voted in by their peers). A recurring comment was that the most popular students don't always make the best leaders, and that a student leadership position should be a privilege not a popularity contest

## WHAT WE HEARD

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*“As a prefect, you’ve got so many conflicting personalities and ideas and you all think you can change the world and it’s just not how it works.”*

“

*“Leadership skills in student leadership weren’t really nurtured.”*

*“It was awesome, getting the leadership responsibility, but I found it hard because you had the title but at that age you were wanting to do something with it. At my school, you just ran assemblies and I wanted to do more than that.”*

*“The rest of our student executive team had to fend for themselves.”*

*“I didn’t want to be a prefect, I wanted to be head girl. Unfortunately, I didn’t get it which was quite a hard thing to take before I felt like I was quite deserving of it... it was really hard and there wasn’t a lot of support.”*

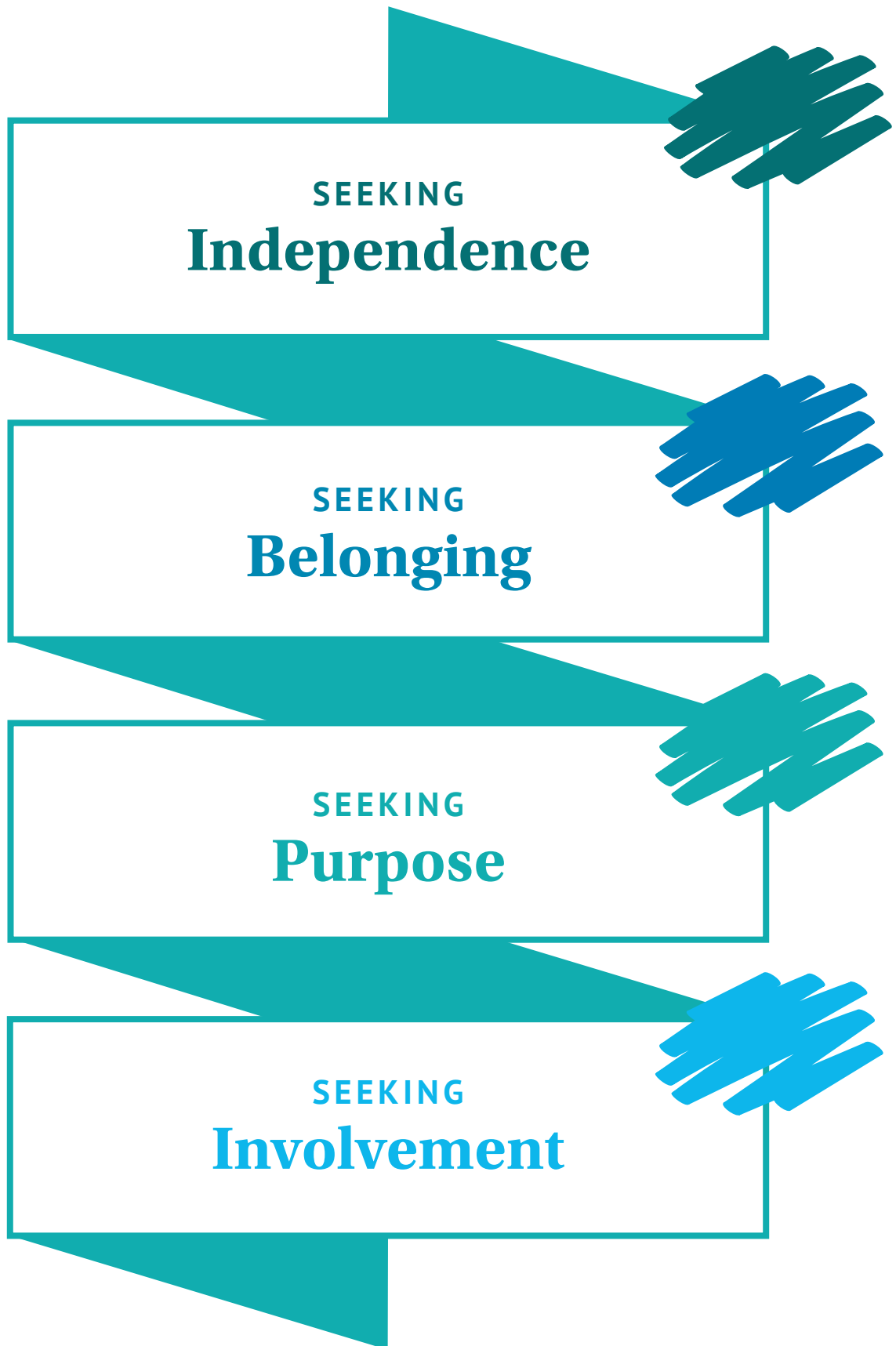
*“Leadership is someone who doesn’t let it go to their head. Our head girl was quite up herself... took the role as if ‘I’m the most important person now’ whereas the head boy was very much about being humble but took the role seriously.”*

**Who  
we**



**met**







## SEEKING Independence

**Students seeking independence are curious and self-assured learners. They like to make their own decisions and appreciate being given a choice in their learning. Self-determined, they know what their interests are and have a clear plan of what they want to achieve. They thrive when they are given the space to be themselves.**

Often encouraged to be independent at home, they approach their learning environment in the same way. They are tactile learners who learn by exploring and doing. Whilst they are happy doing their own thing, those seeking independence also feel compelled to help those around them, whether that's younger students or peers.

They appreciate educational leaders who relate learning to life outside of school. Learning for them isn't only about subjects it's also about how to deal with issues in their world. Education leaders that stepped outside of the curriculum or those who were open to the students setting their own agenda, made a positive impression. Whilst they seek independence in their learning, it is very important for them to feel that education leaders genuinely care for them.

*"He was really flexible, we would turn up and he'd be like what do you want to do today?"*

*"There is a curriculum and it might be too scary for some people to step outside of that because you have to do what you are told. But when they do go above and beyond it makes a huge difference and it sets you up in more ways than you expect it to."*

*"I definitely led myself on my own path during school."*

### WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM EDUCATION LEADERS?

#### Someone who:

- Can lead a learner to the work, get them started and help if they need it
- Is open to sharing their personal experiences of learning
- Is creative and flexible with what they teach and how they teach it, allowing learners to set their own learning agenda
- Connects the learning to the 'real world' experience of the learner and explains the why
- Is not bounded by their subject
- Allows learners to be independent, but also shows learners they genuinely care
- Let's the learner know where they stand and the boundaries they can explore within
- Can balance being relatable and authoritative

## SEEKING Belonging

*“Obviously school is a second home so why don’t they make it homely, a safe home.”*

*“It became more of a brotherhood, we have to stick together and make sure that we’re all ok. The year 13’s looked after the little kids especially and that relationship from the senior school to the junior school definitely increased... you got an understanding of growing up within that family.”*

*“Our Principal made school feel like it was a collective.”*

**Those students seeking belonging create opportunities for themselves and others to come together. They enjoy discovering who they are and where they belong. These students are generally happy and open to connecting with others. They consider all people equal and consider that everyone has something valuable to contribute. Those seeking belonging have the capacity to be self-reflective, learning from life as well as learning at school.**

As community minded people, these learners expected school to be a positive extension of the values of the groups and communities in which they already felt they belonged. Without this sense of community and a shared reason to come together with others, these learners struggled to thrive at school.

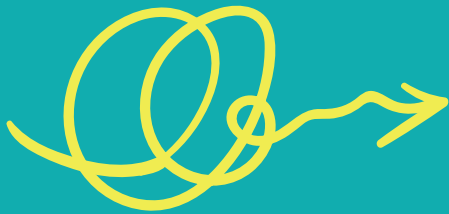
While the academic aspects of school were important, it was in the extracurricular activities around sport, art, culture and community engagement where these learners found themselves. Their pride in themselves was built on the contribution they made to school spirit.

### WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM EDUCATION LEADERS?

#### Someone who:

- Shares their enthusiasm for joining in and joining up
- Calls on the best in them, reminding them of the value to the group over the individual
- Leads from the middle or behind: a non-hierarchical experience of leadership
- Shares their values of fairness, authentic connection, and contribution
- Creates opportunities for learners to come together around a shared interest – sport, art, culture or religion
- Is a strong, positive role model, someone who is admired by others in the school or their wider community that they can look up to and learn from

## SEEKING Purpose



Those students seeking purpose look to connect with others around a shared goal. They are open-minded thinkers who have a deep respect for people who share their values and interests. For those seeking purpose it takes some time to settle on a direction for learning.

They may take longer to make decisions, sometimes resulting in missed opportunities. When they experience personal failure, taking a step forward can be made harder if doing so also means changing friendship groups, or straying from what they see as 'safe'.

School for them was sometimes a lonely experience as they struggled to find 'their people'. They would regularly change friendship groups, swap curriculum subjects and explore a range of extracurricular activities looking for something or someone to 'click'. Once common interests were identified, friendships grew, often extending beyond the classroom.

For them, great education leaders make connections between the learner, their interests and their peers, helping negotiate the social rules of group forming. Education leaders who make an effort to create a personal connection with the learner become trusted guides on the learner's educational and social journey.

*"Everyone that's had an impact on my life through education, I have taken bits of people – fraction by fraction. I have become a construct of all the people that have made an impact."*

*"Know that people would look at you and judge you day-to-day was nerve-wracking. You might do something wrong, and being at that age there was high chance you could do something wrong. There were lots of expectations I wasn't sure I could meet."*

*"My teacher helped me discover what my limits were a bit more and what I could actually achieve rather than just playing inside the square."*

### WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM EDUCATION LEADERS?

#### Someone who:

- Role models values that align with their own, their family and community
- Establishes a community of learners around a shared passion or area of expertise and continues to facilitate the group coming together
- Recognises what the learner is proud of about themselves, encouraging them to succeed beyond their own expectations
- Helps learners uncover their niche: their passion, special skill or talent
- Guides the learner through learning, taking time to acknowledge the individual's struggles and achievements
- Coaches the learner through failure, to help the learner uncover the lesson, positively frame the learning and take a positive step forward



## SEEKING Involvement

**Students seeking involvement are passionate about learning. They want the opportunity to participate, but are not always provided with the chance to do so. They want others to see the best in them and accept their differences. They have a fighting spirit and have often overcome many obstacles in their learning journey.**

School for students seeking involvement often wasn't a very positive experience. They felt like they missed out on opportunities to participate, be stretched or to shine in the way they wanted to. Expectations from some education leaders were misaligned with those seeking involvement, they were often set too high or too low. They would like to see more opportunities for assessments to be done in ways other than a written medium, which may play better to their strengths.

For them, great education leaders were the ones that saw the best in them. They saw differences as an opportunity to try something new, rather than a barrier to learning. These education leaders were the ones who adjusted their teaching style to suit the style of the student and took the time to understand their individual need.

*"I was always told that I couldn't do stuff, but I always took it as a challenge to do it."*

*"...They need to think about what can we do as leaders to ensure that every student is able to participate to their full potential, and to reach whatever goals that they have in education."*

*"Some teachers were a lot less focused on the barriers, were more about making things work."*

### WHAT DO THEY NEED FROM EDUCATION LEADERS?

#### Someone who:

- Breaks down to barriers to participation and is more focussed on making things work
- Believes in the potential of all their students, regardless of whether they need more support to get there or not. They have to be accommodating of differences
- Truly understands and cares for an individual's circumstances, challenges or ambitions
- Tailors learning to where the learner is at – whether that is for different learning styles or ways of processing. They see the best in each individual
- Compromises and is willing to work with a student at an individual level
- Helps the learner make decisions at their speed and works alongside them to decide what success looks like for them
- Matches their expectations of the learner with the learner's expectations

## How might the education leadership strategy:

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Support education leaders to work in partnership with students and their support networks to co-design approaches that enable students to fully participate and engage

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Ensure the breadth of learning experiences an educator offers are valued and not constrained by the demands of teaching the academic curriculum

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Embed a culture of reflective practice so education leaders build their understanding of how their behaviour, communication and leadership styles impact on their students

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Support educators in identifying every student's unique skill, passion or interest - helping the student to value this and celebrate their achievements with them

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Enable authentic and genuine student leadership and connections so that strong peer support networks are established and thrive

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Set expectations that professional 'refresh' opportunities are important for educators so they can share and connect real world, relevant and up-to-date experiences with their students

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Enable a community of inclusiveness to be built at all levels within a school environment (and ensuring a culture of exclusion is not tolerated)

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Empower education leaders to foster and nurture communities that students form themselves within the school environment and beyond

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Encourage and support education leaders to share their own personal stories, challenges and learnings so they can authentically connect with their students

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Build students' resilience and ability to learn from both the successes and failures on their learning journey

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Support education leaders in responding and adjusting to students' differing needs



