

## Frequently Asked Questions: Autism New Zealand Education Hub

### Who can attend the school?

Our vision is for autistic learners who are chronically disengaged from a mainstream environment and schools are excluding them. This will encompass a wide range of autistic/neurodivergent learners with a variety of needs. We will work with families/whanau and students to ensure that our school will best meet the needs of every student.

### What is the goal of the school?

Our priority is supporting our learners to achieve their goals by creating a space where neurodivergent learners can thrive in line with our principles of service: <https://autismnz.org.nz/resources/autism-nz-principles-of-service/>

### How will learning be structured?

The model is primarily face-to-face learning, but we recognise the need to remain flexible to help students transition back into in-person learning – providing this is the best model for their learning. As our aim is to support those students who are disengaged from school it's important to support them to return to the classroom.

### Will this school attract ORS funding or MOE services?

No, not specifically. If a student enrolls who has ORS funding, then we will support that student with the resources available to them.

### Where in Auckland/Wellington is the school?

We are still finalising the details of the location of the schools.

### Why only Auckland and Wellington? Why secondary school only?

#### Autism New Zealand National Office

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Petone, Lower Hutt  
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It is our goal to extend this opportunity to learners all around the country, but this will take some time to establish. Although we recognise the need for neuro-divergent friendly schools in primary education, we identified the most need and impact, and we will start with an overlooked group of secondary students.

### [Are you looking for staff?](#)

Most hiring processes for the school will start in 2026. Staff will be autism and trauma informed, and the school will take a neuro-affirming approach. Autism New Zealand has many autistic staff and will continue to look for expertise in lived experience with autism. We will hire qualified teachers as well as other specialist staff.

### [Are these schools for-profit?](#)

No. This is a not-for-profit charter school and Autism New Zealand (the sponsor) is non-profit. There will be no fees and no donations from students. The school funding model is the same as any state school, but we are able to prioritise the use of funding towards better supporting autistic learners by ensuring they have an appropriate sensory friendly environment and smaller teacher to student ratios so that students can thrive.

### [How will you ensure there is independent oversight?](#)

The safety of our students is the utmost priority. All processes and legal requirements will be followed. Our staff will be safety-checked and values aligned. Although we are still finalising the governance structure, there will be layers of accountability to ensure the safety of our students.

### [How long can students attend the school?](#)

This is up to the students and their parents/whanau and caregivers - it is the student's choice how long they enrol.

### [Where do we find out more about the charter school?](#)

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We will be setting up a page on our website. You can also add yourself to our mailing list by becoming a member of Autism New Zealand on the website and follow us on social media.

### What is the evidence base for an autism-specific school?

Autistic teenagers who do not receive ORS funding are nearly three times more likely to be stood down than their non-autistic peers. The 2024 Education Hub report <https://theeducationhub.org.nz/neurodiversity-research-report/> - highlights how autistic and neurodivergent students are currently being failed by the mainstream system with very few alternative options. After exploring options and exploring similar schools overseas, we felt that for students who have been specifically failed and excluded, an alternative option was necessary. We are providing that while continuing to advocate for inclusion and adequate support within mainstream schools.

### What was the timeline for the approval of the charter school?

We began the application process through the Request for Proposal (RFP) process at the beginning of the year and were only approved at the end of October 2025.

### What was the consultation process for the charter school?

We have long been aware of interest in our community – from parents, students, teachers – for a neuro-affirming school, so have had multiple conversations with the community over the years. To the extent that it was possible during the application process due to confidentiality we consulted with the community during this time. Now, we are continuing our consultation with the community as we develop the school. Like our other programmes and services, these will be developed with the community.

### Does your charter school align with the Education Act, particularly in terms of restrictive enrolment?

We have ensured that the Autism New Zealand Education Hub meets all legislative requirements, including open enrolment. It will be standard process to work with learners and their families/whanau and caregivers to discuss whether our school will best meet the needs of all students who apply.

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