Climate Change Education Guidelines for Aotearoa New Zealand

Image credit: Matthew Baigent
Winning artist, 10 and under category, Generation Zero Art Exhibition

Introduction

These Climate Change Education Guidelines support teachers and schools to prioritise the well-being of children and young people while preparing them to thrive in a world impacted by a changing climate.

This project originated from work developed under the umbrella of the Aotearoa Climate Education Coalition (ACEC) with the generous assistance of researchers, teachers and educators, from Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond. In January 2026, teachers from throughout Aotearoa came together to share their experiences and ideas about how to nurture young people's understanding, skills and agency to care for the long-term wellbeing of people and our planet.

We welcome your feedback on this work. Please use the 'Get Involved' button on the ACEC website to connect with us.

Our first step is to share a set of dispositions and capabilities that we believe are important for learners to develop through meaningful Climate Change Education. We are continuing to develop other aspects of the guidelines, which will be published here in due course. These will include key concepts, practices and pedagogies, as well as case studies that showcase how Climate Change Education might look across different education settings.

In these Guidelines:

- **Dispositions** are the ways ākonga can think, feel and act as learners.
- **Capabilities** are what ākonga draw on and use to apply their learning in different situations.

For Aotearoa New Zealand, the set of dispositions and capabilities for Climate Change Education presented below have been informed by a range of sources (see Appendix). Together, they provide a foundation for developing learners' understanding of the Earth's climate and the ways human activities influence it, alongside the dispositions and capabilities for making informed decisions and participating in individual and collective action for a climate-resilient future.

Dispositions and Capabilities for Climate Change Education

Whānau Tangata | Cultural Fluency

Demonstrating empathy and respect in diverse cultural contexts. In Aotearoa New Zealand, this is grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi Articles. Climate change education recognises the historical and ongoing processes of colonisation that have disrupted relationships with te taiao. By upholding te ao Māori, we can work together to restore our relationship with te taiao.

What this could look like:

- Knowing your own whakapapa and/or ancestral roots.
- Reflecting on where your own ideas, values, and traditions come from.
- Being able to identify and reflect on your own worldview and how it influences the way you feel, think, and act.
- Knowing the histories of the whenua on which you stand.
- Knowing the histories of the people in your area/these lands.
- Listening to and learning from other perspectives with openness, curiosity and respect.
- Being open-minded and willing to broaden or shift your perspectives.
- Understanding that your own and others' perspectives are based on their worldviews that may be hidden/invisible.
- Looking for connections and commonalities across cultural traditions and perspectives, and recognising and respecting differences.

Some useful resources and stories:

NZCER: Connecting climate change with place and culture and **Climate Justice**
Science Learning Hub: Bicultural design
Pūrākau come alive at Nayland Kindergarten
Atua Māori bring sustainability to life at Barnardos Early Learning Centre Wainuiomata

Te Ao Tūroa | Ecological Connectedness

Thinking about and feeling our reciprocal relationship within nature. Understanding that climate change is impacted by interconnected environmental, social, cultural and economic systems and processes, and reflecting on our responsibilities to care for te taiao.

What this could look like:

- Understanding ways in which we, our whānau, communities and other parts of our worlds are interconnected.
- Understanding how what happens around us can influence us and how we can influence what is happening around us.
- Understanding how different systems interact in climate change.
- Considering complexities involved in particular issues or situations.
- Understanding that climate relationships (systems) between Papatūānuku and Ranginui and other atua such as Tāwhirimātea have always been dynamic.
- Recognising how human actions are accelerating change.
- Feeling and thinking about how climate impacts self, community, and others including the more-than-human.

Some useful resources and stories:

NZAEE: Nature Connection for Aotearoa Educators
Earth Dreamers: Growing hope in response to the climate crisis
Seasonal Rhythms, Growing, Caring and Sharing at An Early Childhood Enviroschool
Taupō Tamariki lead Ngahere Rejuvenation at Reservoir
Environmental Kinship Guide

Wise Meaning-Making

Critically evaluating information and evidence to deepen understanding of complex issues relevant to climate change. Interpreting and/or creating information that contributes to informed dialogue and collective action. Recognising how values, worldviews, assumptions and narratives shape understanding. Using digital technologies thoughtfully, maintaining human judgement, agency and awareness of the environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts of these technologies.

What this could look like:

- Approaching information with curiosity and questioning.
- Using a variety of ways to access, engage with, create, and share information (e.g. science, language, art, music, movement and digital media, etc.).
- Developing and practising critical literacy - being able to analyse underlying messages and purposes for different kinds of information/text.
- Understanding that technologies are not neutral and that ideas and values are embedded in their design.
- Being able to self-regulate when, how, and why we use the technologies that are available.
- Valuing the human aspects of human-technology interaction.
- Knowing when and how to tune in and directly connect to te taiao instead of, or alongside, the digital realm.

Some useful resources:
Science Learning Hub: Critical thinking and ethics
Climate Education - A Teacher's Perspective
Kids Greening Taupō - Climate change

Creative Problem Solving

Approaching complex issues with curiosity, open-mindedness, innovative and imaginative thinking, experimentation, and comfort with uncertainty. Researching and gathering diverse knowledge to help formulate possible solutions. Ability to engage in thinking about the past and the future to consider possible consequences of a solution. Realising that solutions are imperfect, ongoing and involve compromises.

What this could look like:

- Getting started even if you don't know yet exactly what a solution could be.
- Being open to changing your plans once you learn more or get feedback that is challenging, constructive, or points out something you haven't considered.
- Using creative or playful approaches to explore possible solutions, and then doing research to dig more deeply into these ideas to see what 'else' you need to know or think about.
- Applying a systematic method to identifying possible solutions and applying the question, 'how will we know this solution will work (evaluative thinking) and be acceptable to others'? (perspective thinking).
- Having a vision for the future that supports the regeneration of environmental health, social connectedness, cultural vibrancy and economic prosperity.
- Adopting holistic, systems, and intergenerational thinking when evaluating consequences of possible solutions.

Some useful resources and stories:
NZCER: Leadership and school-wide climate responses
NZAEE Webinar recording: Uplifting the vision of young people
Street Art: Children's voices and climate action
Wondering about weeds and water on the Waitaua awa – BestStart Pipiwai

Mahi Tahi | Collective Agency and Leadership

Having the courage, confidence, and competency to act toward restoring our relationship with te taiao and addressing the challenges of climate change. Recognising individual capacity to change, while also working together through relationships and collaboration. Supporting tino rangatiratanga and drawing inspiration from innovative change-making efforts locally, nationally and globally. Leading through partnerships, shared vision and inclusivity.

What this could look like:

- Respecting Article Two of Te Tiriti o Waitangi through encouraging tino rangatiratanga.
- Making a personal commitment to contribute to positive change in your early childhood centre, school, kura, local community and wider society.
- Identifying opportunities, gaps or barriers to change and working with others to address them.
- Working with other ākonga, kaiako, whānau and community members to recognise an environmental or climate challenge, and learn to plan and carry out an action response.
- Drawing on local knowledge, mātauranga Māori, research and lived experience to identify appropriate responses.
- Finding out what people think, value and know through reading, conversations, surveys or other approaches, and using what is learned to inform action responses.
- Building relationships and partnerships with people and organisations inside and beyond the school to strengthen collective action responses.
- Learning about different leadership strengths and roles and recognising that leadership can be relational and collaborative rather than hierarchical.
- Creating inclusive opportunities for others to participate, ensuring different voices, perspectives and ways of knowing are valued.
- Sharing learning, stories and experiences of action with others to encourage participation and extend the influence of the work.

Some useful resources and stories:

NZCER: Climate change - what can schools do?
Renwick Kindergarten Enviroschools journey with Rousehill Reserve
Surplus puaka and provocations lead to Lees Street Kindergarten Sharing Shelf
Learning to stand strong in the community
Supporting Taiohi Voice, Agency and Leadership on Climate Change in Porirua
Climate Faith and Action Guide

Adaptive Resilience

Responding to adversity by maintaining wellbeing, emotional regulation, and hope. Fostering individual and collective resilience to cope with uncertainty and adapting to and leading change related to climate challenges.

What this could look like:

- Recognising that climate change is happening and that people have the ability to address it.
- Being prepared for and proactive in responding to the challenges climate change presents.
- Understanding that anticipation and vision are part of resilience and help us to be more open to adaptation.
- Ensuring that mitigation and adaptation to climate challenges is equitable and inclusive.
- Believing that positive relationships and collective action to address climate challenges can contribute to a safer and healthier future.
- Being emotionally resilient when severe climate events strike so that you can help yourself and others to recover from the challenges.
- Understanding that technological responses to climate change can help but only if designed with human and planetary wellbeing at their core.

- Adopting a hopeful mindset in caring for and working with others to adapt, when this is the best way forward, and to bring everyone along.
- Reflecting on successes and setbacks, adapting approaches and persevering while working towards regenerative change.

Wellbeing resources:

Te Tai Unuora - Climate Change Wellbeing Guide

Appendix

This section provides background on the methodology and sources drawn on to develop this set of dispositions and capabilities for meaningful Climate Change Education as presented in these guidelines.

From te reo me te ao Māori, important dispositions are those relating to concern, care and empathy for te taiao, including for Papatūānuku and Ranginui, and for ngā atua who are kaitiaki of their specific realms, such as Tangaroa, Tāne Māhuta and Tāwhirimātea.

The early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017), notes the significance of dispositions such as courage and curiosity (taking an interest), trust and playfulness (being involved), perseverance (persisting with difficulty, challenge and uncertainty), confidence (expressing a point of view or feeling),taking responsibility, reciprocity, creativity, imagination and resilience. From a Māori perspective, *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017) acknowledges dispositions of rangatiratanga, whakatoi, manaakitanga, aroha, hūmārie and whakahī (p. 23).

In these guidelines, these dispositions have been considered alongside capabilities identified in *Te Mātaiaho* (Ministry of Education, 2026), the *Future-Ready Capabilities* (FutureMakers Ltd, 2026) developed by educators in this country, UNESCO's *Greening Curriculum Guidance* (UNESCO, 2024), and the OECD's *Climate Literacy Framework* (OECD, 2025). These sources have been considered and adapted in relation to the purposes and context of Climate Change Education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Across these sources and perspectives, the importance of strengthening ākonga relationships and connections with nature is increasingly recognised as an important foundation for responding to environmental and climate challenges (The Guardian, 2025).