Aotearoa Infinite Academy

Community Engagement Policy

Purpose

Community engagement at Aotearoa Infinite Academy (Infinite) is a meaningful, respectful partnership between the school and its community, focused on improving the educational experiences, wellbeing, and success of every learner. Effective engagement strengthens students' connection to school, supports belonging in an online environment, and helps ensure that Infinite's learning, wellbeing, and safety systems reflect the real identities, aspirations, and needs of the people we serve. This aligns with evidence that strong school–community partnerships improve student learning and outcomes.

Statutory grounding

Infinite maintains this policy to meet its obligations under the Education and Training Act 2020. In particular, section 212O(k)(ii) requires sponsors of charter schools to have a policy on engagement with the school community.

This statutory grounding reflects a core expectation of good governance: that school direction, priorities, and decision-making are developed in partnership with the school community. Engagement is therefore not an optional extra; it is part of Infinite's duty to govern responsibly and to create the conditions in which students can learn safely, feel included, and achieve their best.

Scope and Application

This policy applies to engagement with Infinite's school community in all contexts where teaching, learning, wellbeing support, governance, or school culture are shaped. Because Infinite is a fully online secondary school, community engagement most often occurs through digital channels and virtual events. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Infinite's virtual classrooms and live learning sessions
- Infinite-managed platforms, portals, and online communities
- school communications, surveys, hui, forums, and consultation processes
- school-related events or activities, whether online or in person
- any engagement or consultation connected to major decisions that affect students, whānau, staff, or the wider school community.

This policy is intended to guide both everyday engagement (such as learning partnerships and community communication) and more formal consultation processes led by the Board or school leadership.

Definition of the School Community

Infinite's approach to engagement is grounded in the Education and Training Act 2020 definition of "school community." In relation to a school, the school community means:

(a) the parents, families, and whānau of the school's students; and
(b) the Māori community associated with the school; and
(c) any other person, or group of persons, who a sponsor considers is part of the school community for the purposes of the relevant provision.

In practice, Infinite recognises that meaningful engagement in an online school must include students as central stakeholders, alongside their parents, families, and whānau. Infinite also recognises that the school community may include a range of overlapping groups and networks connected to our learners and kaupapa, such as disability communities, cultural communities, LGBTQIA+ communities, learning support and wellbeing agencies, pathway schools or tertiary partners, and other groups the Board determines are relevant to engagement on a given issue.

Infinite therefore takes an inclusive, proactive approach to identifying who is part of our school community for engagement purposes, and to ensuring that those whose voices have historically been underrepresented are actively supported to participate.

Guiding Principles

Infinite's engagement with its school community is guided by the following principles:

- **Partnership and mutual respect**: Engagement is a two-way relationship. Infinite values the knowledge, perspectives, and lived experience of students, whānau, and community groups, and approaches all engagement with professionalism, openness, and care.
- **Student voice and agency**: Students are not passive recipients of schooling; they are active members of the school community. Infinite seeks student input in age-appropriate, culturally safe ways on matters that affect their learning, wellbeing, safety, and experience of school.
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership**: Infinite is committed to meaningful, ongoing partnership with the Māori community associated with the school. Engagement with Māori whānau and communities is grounded in respect for mana whenua, whakapapa connections, tikanga, mātauranga Māori, and te ao Māori. Māori voices will shape decisions that affect Māori learners and the wider school culture.
- **Equity and accessibility**: Infinite recognises that not all community members experience the same access to time, technology, language support, confidence, or safe spaces for participation. Engagement processes are designed to reduce these barriers, with particular attention to groups who have been historically underserved by education.

- **Transparency and trust**: Infinite communicates clearly about what is happening, why engagement is occurring, what decisions are being considered, and how input will be used. Trust is strengthened when the community can see that engagement is genuine and meaningful.
- **Safety, privacy, and professionalism**: Community engagement must protect the physical and emotional safety of students and staff. Infinite upholds privacy obligations, maintains professional boundaries, and ensures engagement spaces are respectful and free from bullying, discrimination, or harm.
- **Reciprocity and continuous improvement**: Engagement is not only about what Infinite asks of its community, but also how Infinite gives back. We acknowledge contributions, share outcomes, and use what we learn to improve learning, wellbeing, and inclusion over time.

Roles and Responsibilities

A safe and effective approach to community engagement requires shared responsibility. While Infinite welcomes engagement from all parts of the school community, the Board, leadership, and staff have specific duties to ensure engagement is meaningful, inclusive, and connected to student outcomes.

The Board of the Sponsor

The Board has overall responsibility for ensuring Infinite meets its statutory and governance obligations in relation to community engagement. This includes maintaining this policy, identifying who is part of the school community for engagement purposes, and ensuring engagement processes are used to inform school direction and major decisions. The Board is responsible for ensuring meaningful partnership with Māori communities associated with Infinite. The Board receives reporting on engagement effectiveness and uses community voice to guide strategic priorities, policy review, and improvement work.

Principal and Senior Leadership

The Principal and senior leaders are responsible for implementing this policy in day-to-day school practice. They ensure engagement processes are planned, resourced, and communicated clearly, and that consultation occurs when required or appropriate. Leadership is responsible for modelling respectful partnership with students, whānau, Māori communities, and other schools, and for ensuring engagement contributes to safe, inclusive learning environments. Leadership also ensures that feedback is considered appropriately, decisions are explained transparently, and follow-through occurs.

Staff

All staff have a responsibility to build positive, respectful relationships with students and whānau, and to engage in ways that uphold Infinite's values, safeguarding duties, and online safety expectations. Staff are expected to communicate clearly and professionally, support student voice, and contribute to consultation or partnership processes when requested. Where staff receive community feedback or concerns, they must respond appropriately, escalate safeguarding or safety matters promptly, and help ensure issues are addressed through the correct processes.

Students

Students are central members of the Infinite community. They are encouraged and supported to share their perspectives on learning, wellbeing, safety, and school culture through the engagement and consultation channels available to them. Students are expected to participate respectfully and to uphold the standards in the Student Code of Conduct within all community engagement contexts.

Parents, families, whānau, and community partners

Parents, families, and whānau are key partners in student learning and wellbeing. Infinite encourages them to participate actively in engagement and consultation processes, to communicate respectfully, to support student participation, and to raise concerns early through the appropriate pathways. Wider community partners and other schools are expected to engage with Infinite in good faith, with shared focus on student outcomes, safety, and inclusion.

Types of Engagement at Infinite

Infinite uses a range of engagement approaches depending on purpose, urgency, and who is affected. In practice, engagement sits across three connected types: communication, consultation, and partnership. Each plays a distinct role in building a safe, inclusive, and high-performing online school community.

Communication

Communication is the regular, two-way sharing of information between Infinite and its school community. It ensures students, whānau, and community groups understand what is happening at Infinite, why it matters, and how it connects to student learning and wellbeing. Communication includes routine updates about learning programmes, assessment and pathways, wellbeing and safety supports, attendance and engagement expectations, policy

changes, and key school events or initiatives. Communication is not only "broadcasting" information; Infinite also creates space for questions, feedback, and clarification so that school information is accessible and useful to the community.

Consultation

Consultation is a specific, planned form of engagement focused on understanding the aspirations, experiences, and wishes of the school community in relation to a defined topic or decision. Consultation goes beyond collecting opinions: it involves meaningful dialogue, an active commitment to listening, and clear communication about how feedback will be considered. Infinite consults when developing, reviewing, or making significant changes to school direction, policies, programmes, or practices that affect students and whānau. Students are consulted where appropriate and in age-appropriate ways, particularly on matters that directly shape their learning and school experience.

Partnership

Partnership refers to deeper, ongoing relationships where Infinite and its community work together to shape priorities, solve problems, and support learner success. Partnership can include co-design of initiatives, shared leadership in particular areas of school life, and sustained collaboration with groups connected to student identity and wellbeing. Partnerships are grounded in reciprocity: Infinite recognises that community members contribute expertise, cultural knowledge, and lived experience, and Infinite in turn commits to acting on that knowledge with integrity. Meaningful partnership with the Māori community associated with Infinite is a core part of this approach and reflects Infinite's commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Why Engagement Matters

Strong engagement with the school community improves both student outcomes and the quality of school decision-making. When Infinite actively involves its community, it builds relationships that support learning, wellbeing, and belonging — especially important in a fully online environment where students and whānau may otherwise feel isolated or disconnected. Students are more likely to thrive when their culture, identity, values, and aspirations are understood and reflected in the way the school operates.

Engagement also strengthens governance. The Board and school leadership are better able to identify what is working well, what needs to change, and what success should look like when community voices are genuinely heard. This leads to more informed, grounded decisions that are aligned with shared goals and with the real experiences of students and whānau. Engagement

therefore supports both Infinite's prevention-first approach to safety and wellbeing and its commitment to equity and inclusion.

Finally, engagement builds trust. Clear, consistent communication and transparent consultation help the community understand how and why decisions are made. When community members can see that their input matters and influences outcomes, confidence in Infinite grows, and future collaboration becomes easier and more constructive.

Key Engagement Domains

Infinite engages with its school community across the full life of the school, with particular focus on areas that most directly shape student learning, safety, wellbeing, and belonging. The domains below outline where engagement is expected to occur, recognising that different topics require different levels of communication, consultation, or partnership.

- **Learning progress, curriculum, and pathways**: Infinite works with students and whānau to support meaningful learning progress, subject choices, and future pathways, including NCEA planning and post-school transitions.
- **Wellbeing, pastoral care, and safeguarding**: Engagement supports shared understanding of wellbeing systems, early help-seeking, and the way Infinite responds to safety concerns, including online harm or child protection issues.
- **Attendance and engagement**: Infinite partners with whānau and students to strengthen regular participation, address barriers early, and maintain connection to learning — particularly where disengagement may signal wellbeing or equity concerns.
- **Inclusion and learning support**: Infinite engages closely around learning support needs and strengths, including Special Educational Needs, gifted and talented provision, English language learning support, IEP development, and Special Assessment Conditions.
- **School culture, values, and inclusive practice**: Engagement helps ensure Infinite's culture reflects the identities and aspirations of its learners and community, and that expectations for respectful, safe participation remain clear and shared.
- **School direction and major decisions**: The Board and leadership engage with the school community when developing or reviewing strategic priorities, significant policy changes, or major programme developments that affect students or whānau.
- **Transitions and continuity**: Engagement supports students and families during key changes, including entry to Infinite, moves between year levels or programmes, and transitions to tertiary study, training, or employment.

These domains are not exhaustive. Infinite may also engage on other matters where community voice is important to student outcomes or to the safe and inclusive operation of the school.

Consultation at Infinite

Consultation is a deliberate and planned process through which Infinite seeks to understand the aspirations, experiences, and wishes of its school community on specific topics or decisions. It is not a one-off request for opinions, but a structured two-way conversation that supports good governance, equity, and student success.

Infinite will use consultation when developing, reviewing, or making significant changes to the school's strategic direction which may affect students, whānau, or the wider school community. Consultation will also occur where required by law or regulation, and where the Board determines that community voice is necessary to make well-informed and legitimate decisions.

Consultation at Infinite focuses on those most affected by the decision under consideration. This includes students and their whānau, and may require particular attention to groups who have historically been underserved or underrepresented in education. At Infinite, this includes (where relevant to the topic):

- Māori students and whānau
- Pasifika students and families
- disabled students and students with learning support needs, including gifted and talented learners
- students who are not progressing or are at risk of disengagement
- students in care, under protection orders, or within youth justice contexts (as appropriate and safe).

Students are consulted in age-appropriate and culturally safe ways on matters that directly affect their learning, wellbeing, safety, and sense of belonging. Consultation with students is recognised as an important part of maintaining a school environment free from racism, stigma, bullying, or discrimination.

Infinite plans consultation in advance and communicates clearly about its purpose and process. A consultation process will normally make clear:

- the purpose and scope of the consultation
- who is being consulted and why
- the methods being used to support meaningful participation across different groups
- the questions or issues being explored
- the timeframe for input and decision-making
- how information will be stored, protected, and used, including privacy safeguards
- when and how the school will report back to the community.

Infinite is committed to closing the loop after consultation. We will thank participants, provide a summary of what we heard, and explain how community input influenced the final decision, or why a different approach was taken. This accountability is essential to trust and to sustaining ongoing partnership.

Engagement with Māori Communities Associated with Infinite

Infinite is committed to meaningful, ongoing engagement with the Māori community associated with the school. This reflects both Infinite's statutory and ethical obligations to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi and our belief that strong partnership with Māori communities improves educational outcomes, wellbeing, and belonging for Māori learners and for the wider school community.

As a fully online school, Infinite serves students and whānau across the country, and many of our Māori learners whakapapa to different iwi, hapū, and whānau throughout the motu. Infinite therefore recognises that there is no single "Māori community" and no single way of engaging. Our approach must be flexible, relational, and responsive to the diverse identities, locations, and aspirations of Māori students and their whānau.

Engagement with Māori communities is grounded in respect for mana whenua, for the whakapapa connections of our students and whānau, and for the richness and diversity of te ao Māori within Infinite. Infinite recognises that Māori communities have the right to shape how they engage with the school, and that genuine partnership requires listening first, investing in relationships over time, and approaching engagement with humility and cultural care.

In practice, Infinite will:

- build and maintain relationships with Māori students, whānau, and wider Māori communities connected to the school, including those linked through whakapapa across multiple iwi and regions;
- create culturally safe opportunities for engagement in online formats that suit whānau and community preference, guided by tikanga and kaupapa Māori approaches where appropriate;
- ensure Māori voices inform decisions that affect Māori learners, including their wellbeing, identity, learning pathways, and experiences of belonging;
- work in ways that are reciprocal, acknowledging that Māori communities bring knowledge, histories, and aspirations that strengthen Infinite's culture and curriculum; and
- reflect Māori perspectives and aspirations in school direction, inclusive practice, curriculum design, and wellbeing supports.

Infinite understands that meaningful Māori engagement is not a one-off event or a compliance exercise. It is a living relationship — online and across distance — that supports identity, connection, and success for Māori learners, and contributes to a safe, inclusive, and excellent learning environment for all ākonga.

Engagement with Other Schools

Infinite recognises that its school community sits within a wider national education network. As a fully online school, Infinite will work alongside other schools across Aotearoa to support learner pathways, wellbeing, and access to opportunities that benefit students wherever they are based. Engagement with other schools also supports shared learning and continuous improvement in areas such as curriculum delivery, assessment practice, inclusion, and student support.

In practice, Infinite may partner with other schools in ways that are collaborative, respectful, and grounded in student need. This can include working with local schools to host shared events or extra-curricular opportunities, arranging supervised assessment settings or venues so Infinite students can sit exams safely and fairly, coordinating supports for students who are enrolled with more than one provider, and sharing expertise where initiatives align. Infinite will approach these relationships in good faith, recognising the special character and responsibilities of partner schools, and ensuring that any collaboration maintains Infinite's safeguarding standards, privacy obligations, and duty of care to its own learners.

Engagement with other schools will be guided by clear communication, agreed expectations, and a focus on what best supports students' learning, safety, and belonging.

Engagement Structures and Channels

Online-first engagement approach

Infinite uses a range of online-first engagement structures and channels to build connection, share information, and create genuine opportunities for community voice. Engagement is designed to be accessible, responsive, and suited to the realities of a geographically dispersed online school. Infinite therefore combines live and asynchronous formats so that students, whānau, and community members can participate in ways that work for their circumstances, time zones, and access to technology.

Core engagement is embedded in Infinite's day-to-day learning ecosystem. Families and students engage through Infinite's learning management and communication platforms, which provide access to learning information, wellbeing supports, notices, and pathways guidance.

Alongside this, Infinite schedules regular opportunities for live engagement that create space for dialogue, questions, and shared problem-solving. These may include:

- virtual hui and meetings
- webinars and information events
- learning and progress conferences
- consultation meetings or forums linked to Board or school decisions.

Where appropriate, live sessions are offered at varied times and/or recorded so engagement is not limited to those who can attend in real time.

Student voice and community feedback pathways

Student voice is supported through structured avenues embedded within school life, enabling students to influence decisions that affect their learning, wellbeing, and experience of belonging. These pathways may include:

- student advisory groups or panels
- student forums or facilitated discussions
- surveys, polls, and feedback tools
- class or programme-level reflection processes.

Whānau and wider community feedback is gathered through multiple channels to ensure both routine partnership and more formal input are possible. This may include surveys, consultations, hui, meetings, and ongoing communication channels with staff and leadership. Infinite is committed to reporting back after consultation or major feedback processes so contributors can see how their input was considered and what outcomes followed.

Equity, accessibility, and continuous improvement

Infinite recognises that equitable engagement requires more than offering opportunities — it requires removing barriers. Engagement is therefore designed to support participation across diverse contexts, including by:

- using clear, inclusive, and culturally respectful language
- providing multiple formats and levels of formality (live/asynchronous, written/verbal)
- supporting accessibility needs such as captioning, assistive technology, or language support where possible
- actively identifying and reaching those who may be less visible in online spaces, including families with limited connectivity, heavy work/care responsibilities, or different cultural communication preferences.

Engagement methods and channels may evolve over time as Infinite grows and as community needs change. The Board and leadership will review engagement approaches periodically to ensure they remain inclusive, effective, and aligned with the purposes of this policy.

School Community Conduct Expectations

Shared expectations for safe and respectful engagement

Infinite is committed to fostering a respectful, inclusive, and supportive environment for everyone involved in school life. Community engagement can only be effective when interactions are safe, constructive, and grounded in mutual respect. These expectations apply in all Infinite contexts, including virtual classrooms, online events, forums, written communications, and any in-person or off-site activities organised with or through Infinite.

In all school-related engagement and communications, members of the school community are expected to:

- comply with relevant New Zealand law and regulation
- follow reasonable requests or instructions from Infinite staff
- support student learning, wellbeing, and belonging
- take reasonable care for their own health and safety
- ensure their behaviour does not negatively affect the health, safety, dignity, or inclusion of others
- respect privacy and confidentiality, including not sharing images, recordings, or personal information about students, staff, or families without permission and a lawful basis.

Online conduct and alignment with Infinite's Codes

Because Infinite is an online school, conduct expectations also include safe and responsible use of digital platforms. Community members must communicate in ways that are courteous and inclusive, avoid discriminatory, inflammatory, or demeaning language, and refrain from any behaviour that could be experienced as bullying, harassment, intimidation, or misuse of online spaces. Where engagement spaces are moderated to protect safety and wellbeing, community members are expected to cooperate with moderation decisions and to raise concerns through the appropriate channels rather than escalating conflict in public forums.

Detailed expectations for particular groups are set out in Infinite's Codes of Conduct and related policies, including the Student Code of Conduct, Parent/Whānau Code of Conduct, Staff Code of Conduct, Online Safety Policy, and Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment Policy. This policy confirms that those standards apply equally within community engagement contexts.

Managing Concerns and Incidents Involving the Community

Infinite encourages early, respectful, and constructive raising of concerns. Anyone who wishes to bring a matter to the school's attention should do so through the Complaints Policy and Procedures available on Infinite's website, or by contacting an appropriate staff member such as a teacher, Dean, or a member of the leadership team. Infinite expects concerns to be raised in good faith, with a willingness to work collaboratively toward resolution.

To protect privacy, safety, and natural justice, if a member of the school community has a concern or complaint about a student who is not their child, they should contact Infinite rather than approaching the student or their parents/whānau directly. This boundary is particularly important in online environments, where direct contact can lead to misunderstanding or escalation and may unintentionally compromise student safety.

Where a concern relates to community conduct or an incident affecting the safety or inclusion of others, Infinite will respond promptly and fairly. Responses will be proportionate to the issue, guided by natural justice, and focused first on restoring a safe and respectful environment. Where needed to protect wellbeing, Infinite may place temporary conditions on participation in engagement spaces (for example, moderating access to a forum or restricting participation in an event) while a matter is assessed. Any such steps will be followed by appropriate communication, support, and due process consistent with Infinite's policies.

Media and Public Communications

Infinite recognises that public communications and media interaction can play a positive role in celebrating student success, strengthening community connection, and maintaining transparency. Because Infinite is an online school with students across the motu, public communications must also be managed carefully to protect student safety, privacy, and trust.

All media enquiries or requests for public comment about Infinite, its students, staff, or operations must be directed to an authorised spokesperson. The Board will record any delegation of media spokesperson responsibilities, and staff and community members must not speak publicly on behalf of Infinite unless specifically authorised to do so. This ensures that public statements are accurate, consistent with Infinite's values and policies, and do not compromise confidentiality or natural justice.

Infinite will ensure that its own community is kept appropriately informed about matters that may attract public attention. Where an incident occurs, communication will prioritise wellbeing, factual accuracy, and the protection of those involved. Infinite will avoid speculation, protect personal information, and engage with relevant agencies where required.

Infinite-managed digital channels (such as the school website or official social media) may be used to share news, achievements, and updates. Use of these channels will follow clear internal expectations about who may post, how online discussions are moderated, and how privacy and safeguarding obligations are upheld. Community members are expected to communicate respectfully online and to raise concerns through Infinite's complaints pathways rather than through public forums.

Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Infinite approaches community engagement as an active and ongoing part of school life, not a one-off exercise. Engagement is most effective when it is deliberate, inclusive, and connected to real decision-making and student outcomes. The Board and leadership will therefore ensure that engagement opportunities are planned in advance where practicable, communicated clearly to the community, and aligned with the domains set out in this policy.

Infinite will monitor the effectiveness of its engagement through a combination of participation data, qualitative feedback, and reflective review. This includes paying attention to who is engaging, who is not, and what barriers might be limiting participation. In particular, Infinite will consider whether engagement is reaching students and whānau whose voices have historically been less visible or less well served in education, and whether additional supports or alternative engagement methods are needed.

Engagement will be evaluated not only by the volume of participation, but by its impact. Indicators may include the extent to which community input informs school direction or practice, improvements in trust and communication, and evidence that engagement supports belonging, wellbeing, attendance, inclusion, and learning progress. Where engagement reveals risks or gaps in safety and inclusion, Infinite will treat those insights as signals for improvement and follow up accordingly.

The Board may, where appropriate, adopt time-bound Community Engagement Plans to support implementation of this policy. Any such plans would outline specific engagement priorities, methods, and timelines for a defined period, while allowing flexibility to respond to emerging needs.

Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually, and also following any significant change to Infinite's operations, regulatory obligations, or learning platform environment, or after any major incident where engagement processes require strengthening. Review will consider the effectiveness of engagement across the school community, including the quality of consultation

and partnership with students, whānau, Māori communities associated with Infinite, and other schools.

Where appropriate, Infinite will seek input from students, whānau, and Māori communities as part of the review process. Revisions will be approved by the Board and communicated clearly to the school community.

Related Policies and Documents

This policy operates alongside, and should be read in conjunction with, Infinite's broader safety, wellbeing, inclusion, and governance framework, including:

- Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
- Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy
- Online Safety Policy
- Safe and Inclusive Learning Environment Policy
- Student Learning, Wellbeing and Behaviour (Discipline and Safety) Policy
- Attendance and Engagement Policy
- Complaints Policy and Procedures
- Educational Delivery & Assessment Policies (including those on SEN, IEP, SAC, ELL, Gifted & Talented, Assistive Technology)
- Student Code of Conduct
- Parent/Whānau Code of Conduct
- Staff Code of Conduct

Acknowledgment

In developing this policy, Infinite has drawn on guidance and resources from the New Zealand School Boards Association and the Education Review Office, adapted to reflect Infinite's special character as a fully online school and the needs of a geographically dispersed community.

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