

Engaging less active rangatahi in physical activity

Reflections and learnings from Active As



Background

Active As is a nationwide project supporting 50 secondary schools and wharekura across the motu to provide quality physical activity opportunities.

What are the aims?



To enhance the wellbeing of rangatahi through physical activity



To increase the physical activity levels of rangatahi, particularly those that are less active



To demonstrate the value of physical activity to educational priorities

Year 1 implementation evaluation findings have shown how **Active As is positively encouraging less active and non-active students to be active**. These are valuable insights which align with evidence based-strategies within a New Zealand context. This document provides specific, tangible examples of these and are worth sharing with the aim of promoting further good practice.



Purpose of this document

To share some key enablers that have supported schools to engage with their less active and non-active rangatahi and create opportunities for them to be physically active. It is for schools and organisations involved in Active As, and any organisation actively working with rangatahi to design and implement physical activity initiatives.



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Create inclusive environments

Ensuring there are opportunities that enhance the mana of all students reinforces the message that physical activity is for everyone, not just those who excel in traditional sports settings.



The findings

1. Celebrating cultural inclusiveness by incorporating tikanga, tuakana-teina relationships, and activities like kapa haka fosters a sense of belonging.
2. Providing safe spaces, such as private gyms, and gender-specific swimming options promotes inclusivity through helping students feel comfortable to participate.
3. Activities can become overly popular, so adjustments are needed to ensure safe spaces for less active are maintained and prioritised.
4. Building relationships through whakawhanaungatanga further strengthens connections and engagement.





What did kaiako tell us?

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Providing areas where students feel comfortable and not judged, such as enclosed spaces for lunchtime activities, has been effective. This reduces the pressure of spectators and encourages participation.

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Ōtorohanga College

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Inactive students tend to engage more with friends or peers of similar skill levels. Our observations indicate that when active and highly extroverted students dominate activities, it can discourage inactive students from joining in. For example, during Hungerball sessions at break times, we noticed that the presence of overly competitive students made inactive participants hesitant to continue.

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Waitākere College

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The two trainers at Chur Kaha gym played a pivotal role in this transformation. Their approach to motivating and supporting the students fostered a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere, breaking down feelings of whakamā (self-consciousness) and resistance. The trainers tailored their coaching style to the students' needs, celebrating small wins and progress, which boosted confidence and engagement.

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Te Kura ō Manutuke

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Providing tailored options for young girls can empower them and enhance their confidence, positively influencing their self-perception and sense of belonging. The success of our Girls Boxing program resulted in increased attendance and demonstrated a growth mindset, allowing students to develop strength and confidence through disciplined activities.

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Tangaroa College



What did this look like?



At Sir Edmund Hilary Collegiate, an off-school-grounds horse-riding programme for select students nurtured a safe and inclusive environment and fostered a sense of belonging. An important rule of the programme was that after learning a new skill, each student had to demonstrate it to the group. The group would not move on until each participant had completed the task. Students felt vulnerable but overcame this emotion through the supportive environment created.



Ōtorohanga College recognised that many of their inactive students experienced anxiety when it came to physical activity, and that providing privacy could significantly help. This included the learning support group who have partly due to using an offsite gym, which allows students to engage without peer distractions. Similarly, the yoga group benefits from having a private space with curtains and blockades, fostering a safe environment free from interruptions.



Female students at **Piopio College** appreciated the whanaungatanga opportunities offered by the Rugby 7s, particularly beneficial for rural students. During a Give it a go Cluster day, students formed balanced teams, ensuring everyone felt included. The boys were very supportive, leading to the girls' successful participation. The emphasis was on participation rather than winning, fostering a positive environment with excellent sportsmanship and student well-being.



What was the rangatahi feedback?

“

I got to learn how to use all these different machines that didn't know how to use before, now I am are confident. I can now teach and encourage other students in my group to do these exercises which makes me feel good. A highlight for me is the friendships and connections I've made in the group. Being a part of this group has also **made it easier for me to come to school and attend my classes**. A big positive for me is that I feel like I'm feeling stronger and fitter.

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Mana College

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Since I joined the Active As program at Ashburton College, **I've really felt like I'm part of the school community**. At first, I wasn't sure where I fit in because it's easy to feel like just another student among so many. But through Active As, I've had the chance to participate in **fun**, group activities like team sports.

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Ashburton College

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Several of our wāhine who participated (in the Omaka Girls Day Out) have now **chosen to be part of the Forward Foundation group** that runs a 'not so sports club' after school. They are out doing active activities.

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Te Aratai College

Remove the pressure

By prioritising fun, enjoyment, and inclusivity and providing non-competitive options, physical activity is more appealing and accessible to all students.



The findings

1. Offering non-competitive, or casual options such as hungerball, tug of war, pickleball, esports, and archery provides accessible ways for students to participate, without the fear of judgment or failure.
2. Emphasising fun through creative activities, such as juggling and dance, keeps students engaged and motivated.
3. Student-led activities help foster connection and encouragement, while unstructured play and informal settings, including swings and free play resources, create opportunities for movement without rigid expectations.





What did kaiako tell us?

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Creating a supportive environment where there is no pressure to perform at a high level immediately helps in making less active students feel more comfortable.

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Taumarunui High School

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Non-competitive and fun based activities have also been appealing. Eliminating prior experience and having different challenges for different abilities has enabled more students to experience success pertinent to them – it’s been a great equaliser.

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Whangārei Girls High School

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When we offered less traditional activities the less active students came and participated more often as they said they did not feel as threatened because no one really knew what they were doing – like at Golf and Archery and also pickleball.

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Rotorua Girls High School

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Environments that emphasise play and participation over structure and competition create a welcoming atmosphere. This relaxed setting has increased interest and commitment among students who typically do not engage in activities, motivating them to return regularly. Our Morning Badminton sessions, open to all students not on a School representative team, show this, as participants enjoy the focus on fun rather than competition.

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Waitākere College



What did this look like?



Haeata Community Campus noticed that ākonga who are not usually active can be shy, anxious and whakamā about their ability level. After introducing table tennis tables, they noticed straight away that like-minded ākonga grouped together and did not participate with the ākonga that love sports. This meant they could play and have fun and not be embarrassed that they could not hit the ball every time.

There was also a student who would previously sit out or leave class during our PE session. They have been fully engaged since introducing the table tennis tables, and he even likes to challenge others in the class and also kaimahi.



At **Te Kūiti High School** [Map My Walk](#) was a very popular initiative with non-active students. 53% of all participants in the challenge were students who are non active and always have been at school. These ranged from Y9s to Y13s and included all genders.



What was the rangatahi feedback?

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I feel that there was something for everyone and I liked that those who didn't want to participate were **encouraged to but not forced**.

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Ashburton College

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Trying new things **without the pressure** of having to be good at it.

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Ashburton College

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It helped me **push my** comfort zone **barriers**.

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Ashburton College

Prioritise connection

By integrating social elements, physical activity becomes a more appealing experience for all.



The findings

1. Encouraging participation with friends or peer groups - including bring-a-friend initiatives - creates a supportive and enjoyable environment, fosters a sense of belonging and makes students more likely to take part.
2. Leadership opportunities for already active students, including tuakana-teina mentoring, allows experienced students to guide and inspire others.
3. Cluster-based camps with multiple schools provide immersive opportunities for connection and shared experiences.
4. Leveraging social media to engage students, communicate opportunities, and reflect on participation can further strengthen involvement and motivation.





What did kaiako tell us?

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Leveraging tuakana-teina dynamics encouraged rangatahi to participate, as older students modeled engagement and offered guidance to their peers.

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Tairāwhiti Town Cluster

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Activities that promote social interaction, like Foursquare and three-on-three basketball, have been popular among students who are not typically involved in regular sports teams. The social aspect and the fun environment have been key motivators.

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Ngā Taiātea Wharekura

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Active As has had a positive effect on social outcomes, students are happy, communication and interacting with each other has improved, negative comments and bullying has decreased, and we have seen a shift in more friend groups and more inclusion within peers during breaktime.

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Thames High School



What did this look like?



At **Hawaiki Hou** the more 'active' taura are supporting our 'less active' taura much more, therefore they empower all taura to value their worth in all aspects of active activities.



Social skills, and interpersonal skills for our special needs students at **Thames High School** has improved by the students joining into the PA rotation most weeks, this has been able to happen by them not being judged but encouraged by their peers in the group. It is also helping improve their anxiety by being included into normal school life. They are loving being able to wear our sports shirts and house colors. We have seen them join in more with our house activities.



Te Kura ō Te Ahupoo (TKKM) event brought together schools from the **Turanga Cluster** in Gisborne Tairāwhiti. Groups were deliberately mixed to promote interactions among taura beyond their usual schoolmates, fostering wider connections and minimising the want to remain with familiar peers. This enhanced relationships across kura and expanded social networks. One kōhine said she usually spent her school time with her boyfriend, but her experience at TKKM allowed her to make new friends, and she looked forward to staying in touch with them.



What was the rangatahi feedback?

“

The highlight for me has been all the people I have been able to connect with through our Tuesday and Thursday lunchtime activities. I also love seeing the variety of people that get involved with our activities boys, girls, seniors, juniors, friend groups, and individuals. It's just **amazing to see so many different people interacting together and having fun.**

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Tawa College

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I really enjoyed getting involved in fun activities with friends both in my ako class and out of my ako class. It's really good for **lighthearted connection to different students in school that you'd never usually connect with.** And it's a mental break from learning, changes it up a bit which is nice.

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Ashburton College

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One of my favourite things at school is the Wednesday morning badminton sessions in the gym before class. It's such a fun way to start the day, and I love playing with my friends. The gym is the perfect place for it, and it's nice to do something active before school even starts. **It's not just about getting moving, but also about hanging out with friends and having fun.**

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Waitākere College



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Respond to feedback

Be flexible and willing to adjust to the insights from rangatahi



The findings

1. Engaging in one-on-one conversations, as well as group forms and surveys, gives valuable insights directly from students. By adapting programmes based on these suggestions, educators can keep activities fresh and relevant, enhancing student motivation.
2. Promoting initiatives where students see their input reflected in the programme delivery fosters a sense of ownership and inclusivity.
3. Personally encouraging and inviting individual rangatahi to participate in activities can boost their confidence and willingness to engage. This personalised approach not only acknowledges each student's unique perspective but also actively involves them in shaping their physical activity experiences.





What did kaiako tell us?

“

We have found that our students are unlikely to put their voice forward if they are not going to see themselves reflected in the actions that follow. It is building trust and showing them that there is action to come out of all the talk.

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Kamo High School

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Regular small wananga with the rangatahi to capture student voice and ideas to implement into the kaupapa. Provide opportunities for those rangatahi who are less engaged to want to be engaged and have fun doing so.

”

Te Waha ō Rerekohu

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When rangatahi feel like they have a stake in an initiative, their engagement levels often rise significantly.

”

Tūranga Tangata Rite

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Student feedback played a crucial role in shaping our plans for terms three and four at TC Ngaru. We conducted surveys to understand students' interests and preferences, revealing a strong desire for after-school boxing. Consequently, we launched an after-school mixed boxing session, which attracted the highest participation in our programmes.

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Tangaroa College



What did this look like?



Waitākere College finds out what activities and sports were enjoyed by students, we have been collecting feedback through observation, Google Forms, and informal conversations to better understand their preferences and consider what sports and activities to continue or adapt for next year.



One thing that was highlighted during consultation at **Liston College** with our non-active student focus group, was that some of them would be interested in being able to do leisurely activities. From this idea came the sport of Disc Golf.



At the start of **Tangaroa College's** term three, students expressed a desire for less sport-oriented activities. Hip-hop dance workshops, drama workshops focusing on physical theatre, and wellbeing clubs for both boys and girls were offered. Despite lower attendance, a steady number of students engaged in these activities weekly, which was a positive outcome for TC Ngaru, as student development and engagement are as important as high participation numbers.



What was the feedback?

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Our Active As student committee would approach and ask rangatahi sitting down (i.e. inactive students) at lunchtimes “what would get you active?” Students being able to answer this question in small groups (or alone) has **helped us to hear what our less active rangatahi would like** and consequently we can plan accordingly.

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**Rangatahi Leaders at
Whangārei Girls High School**

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Listening to student feedback and being willing to revisit and revise projects based on their interests and needs is crucial.

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**Kaiako at
Otorohanga College**

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Being responsive to student feedback and **willing to adapt activities accordingly helps** in maintaining engagement and ensuring that the activities meet the needs and preferences of the students. – Kaiako at Taumarunui High School

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**Kaiako at
Taumarunui High School**



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Be consistent

Gradual, intentional, responsive, and consistent approaches are key to promoting sustained participation in physical activity for all students.



The findings

1. Offering flexible scheduling and making adjustments based on student feedback ensure that programmes remain accessible and responsive to individual needs.
2. Balancing consistency with novelty is crucial to sustaining interest. While regular routines provide structure, introducing new activities keeps the experience engaging.
3. For some students, involvement in organising and managing activities is an entry point to physical activity. This allows them to contribute in ways that align with their interests and slowly build up their confidence and comfort levels to try physical activity experiences themselves.





What did kaiako tell us?

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We have learned to listen and offer a wide range of opportunities. A lot of rangatahi have engaged with our alternative options like Henna Tattoo and Street Art. These options reached capacity for them each time we offered. It also allowed us flexibility if there were some in activities like pickleball or Ju jitsu who last minute did not want to do those types of activities. We were able to pivot and bring them to Henna or Street Art.

”

Rolleston College

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There are legitimate reasons for opting out of participating, and it's crucial to tackle these obstacles. Trust-building takes time, enabling our rangatahi to feel at ease with school-wide programs. We offer chances for them to take on roles like managing registers and helping younger students, which gradually increases their participation. Often, we encourage them to fill in for teams, resulting in past participants playing full seasons in sports.

”

TKKM ō Whatatutu



What did this look like?



By allowing **Taumarunui High School** students to start with minimal participation and gradually increasing their involvement can be effective. For example, students might begin by observing or doing their own activities on the side before joining the main group.



Activities during the multi-school Whakapaupakihi event emphasised teamwork and leadership. Rangatahi in the **Ngāti Porou East Coast Cluster** take on roles within mixed-school teams, learning to problem-solve and collaborate effectively. This skill development aligned with broader educational goals of fostering resilience and leadership.



What was the feedback?

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I've gotten back into better fitness habits and I've enjoyed watching some of the more unique events because they're entertaining. Since joining the Active As program, I've noticed a **big improvement in both my physical and mental wellbeing.** Another benefit is how much more energised I feel throughout the day. Before joining Active As, I would feel sluggish or tired by afternoon, but now I have more stamina, which gets through my studies.

”

Rangatahi at
Ashburton College

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A lot of students are getting a chance to lead where they haven't had the capacity to lead before through Active As...like there's students I never would have thought would put their hand up to lead an activity for their peers' running stations and being part of the Active As student group. And it's awesome to see them get recognition at the assembly for their hard work.

”

Kaiako at
Ashburton College

“

I hate sports. I didn't want to come at first because I thought it was just sports. But **when I realised there would be singing, I came and ended up enjoying some sports too.** It was fun, a win-win.

”

Rangatahi at
Te Waha o Rerekohu Area School

Ensure a range of opportunities

Think outside the box to keep rangatahi engaged and having fun



The findings

1. Entry-level activities with low physical demands, like tug-of-war and handball, provide accessible ways to participate.
2. Emphasising novelty and fun through activities such as juggling and dance keeps students engaged and motivated.
3. Rangatahi-led activities help foster connection and encouragement, while unstructured play and informal settings, including swings and free play resources, create opportunities for movement without rigid expectations.





What did kaiako tell us?

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Non-competitive activities like chess and cooking catered to less active rangatahi, providing a comfortable entry point into participation. For instance, neurodiverse students found success in less traditional activities, boosting their confidence.

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**Whakapaupakihi,
Ngāti Porou East Coast
Cluster**

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From weeks 1 to 5 of Term 3, we rented Hungerball, which became a popular lunchtime activity for students. Its novelty attracted participation, encouraging broader interests in physical activity. The plan is to reintroduce Hungerball with a focus on enjoyment rather than competition.

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Sir Edmund Hillary Collegiate

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Introducing non-traditional games where everyone starts at the same skill level helps in reducing the intimidation factor. These games make it easier for less active students to get involved since no one is an expert from the start.

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Taumarunui High School

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We saw high participation levels from students because in their words “we are getting to do things we like”, “we can do it with our friends”, “it’s fun because we can pick lots of things”, “when other people are doing other stuff, I don’t feel like people are judging and watching me”. We have also put this into a small part of curriculum time last period on a Friday and has really contributed to all aspects of the students hauora.

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Te Kūiti High School



What did this look like?



At **James Cook High School** the engagement of external providers has opened new opportunities for students, resulting in increased participation in activities such as weightlifting and lawn bowls. In term four, 10 students joined the Homai lawn bowls competition, which evolved from a "have a go" day into JCHS's first lawn bowls team. Student confidence has grown, suggesting a positive approach to the programmes in 2025 as students motivate their peers to realise their potential.



Thames High School offered students various alternative activities to stay active. This has included Fire Walking, Stilt walking, Axe Throwing, creating Fire Sculptures for Matariki, and developing performances for extracurricular groups. Engaging in diverse movements enhances physical well-being, and students are enjoying the opportunity to explore different ways to be active.



Māngere College has welcomed play – and activities that students might have participated at primary and intermediate – into the school. This includes Chalk Art, Pickleball, Hungerball, Bubble blowing, Garden Games and Badminton.



What was the rangatahi feedback?

“

Lots of fun, lots of games to choose from and they aren't too hard to learn. I like its simplicity, has a variety of different levels so that anyone can go and play on, it has advanced games for if you wanted to use it to train for something or games/activities to just play and **be active without realising your being active because it's just fun.**

”

Haeata Community Campus

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The giant games is fun because I do not have to run anywhere. I like the activities where I get to run a lot, Bubble Soccer is great as you can run into people. The activities are great. **It gets people doing something else rather than trying to go on their phones or create drama.**

”

Heretaunga College

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Disc Golf is providing a good variety can be competitive or non-competitive, really great equipment, Students love to use it. **Students are more active at lunchtime** - lots more going on. 4 square with the soccer ball - low key and students are playing that heaps.

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Thamas High School



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Utilise the school day and existing resources

Integrating physical activity across the curriculum, and during school hours, helps remove barriers to participation.



The findings

1. Integrating physical activity into the curriculum during school hours addresses time constraints and provides a structured, teacher-managed environment that fosters safety and inclusivity.
2. Offering low-intensity lunchtime activities, such as giant board games or virtual reality sports, caters to students who prefer less strenuous options, ensuring they remain comfortable for subsequent classes.





What did kaiako tell us?

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We found using curriculum time beneficial to engage the non-active students because some of the reasons they were inactive were because of time, therefore making it in a time where they did not have to plan for it took away this barrier. We found this worked well because it is where we saw our participation levels the highest

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Te Kuiti High School

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We had up to 7 female swimmers take part in lessons at Te Rauparaha Arena every Tuesday morning. Swimmers were provided with swimming shorts/top, goggles, and towels and we used the school van to pick up/transport students to and from the pool. All swimmers showed improvement. One swimmer in particular has progressed to be a confident freestyler.

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Porirua College

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Our Ferndale unit (State Specialist School) have made use of the playground swings during class time to support their learners. They now have activities on site that their ākonga can access and it helps with their regulation.

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Haeata Community Campus

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In 2024, we have successfully integrated our Active As hour into the timetable. Offering unstructured activities has greatly benefited our Year 9 students, enhancing their social and communication skills. Students engage creatively, modify games, and confidently take the lead in determining the rules, a trend observed both during Active As hour and break times.

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Thames High School



What did this look like?



Thames High School integrated its Active As hour into the timetable, providing unstructured activities that greatly benefit Year 9 students in developing their social and communication skills. They engage creatively with peers, confidently modifying games and establishing their own rules, a trend that also extends to breaktimes.



At **Tangaroa College**, students from Connected Learning Centre are teenage mothers who desire to continue their education while parenting. As a teenager juggling parenting and working towards NCEA it can become quite difficult to spare any time to get involved in any activity. To address this, the school's first step was to implement active sessions within their timetable, where it was scheduled for these students to be with TC Ngaru for one period each week.



What was the rangatahi feedback?

“

I think ever since we had equipment you could take out at lunchtime and the Tuesday and Thursday activities had no phones we have seen a massive **increase in physical activity across the whole school.**

Activities are happening everywhere. It's really cool to see. So, I think Active-As has had a positive impact on the school.

”

Tawa College

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Participating in different activities through Active As has **positively impacted my wellbeing and made me feel good about myself.** It also helps **me focus more on my classes** after the sessions.

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Rolleston College

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Since the beginning of Active As, there are loads of things to do at lunchtime now, like basketball, touch, cricket, volleyball, rugby, frisbee, soccer, and corn hole. It's a bit of fun and something to do at lunchtime. **Before Active As, there were no opportunities to be active during school, but now we have more things to do.**

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Rolleston College