

Westbridge Residential School – Executive summary

School Name: Westbridge Residential School

Profile Number: 4157

Location: Massey, Auckland

November 2025

Background

Westbridge Residential School is a residential specialist school for students aged 8 to 15 with complex social, behavioural, and learning needs. It is listed as one of nine Special Institutions under Schedule 2 of the Education and Training Act 2020.

In late 2023, the Education Review Office (ERO) identified serious concerns regarding significant behavioural problems and property damage. In response, the school board sought trauma-informed training for staff and updated behaviour management policies. In July 2024, ERO published Board Assurance and Profile reports identifying areas of non-compliance and key improvement priorities. The reports also identified some early improvements that were observed during Term 1, 2024.

However, a further ERO visit in December 2024 found that the frequency and severity of serious incidents, and associated health and safety risks, remained high relative to the school's small roll. ERO identified further priorities, including strengthening behaviour management systems, staff capability, care approaches, and data systems. ERO continued close monitoring, including a further review in September 2025 to assess progress.

Findings

Behaviour Management and Safety

Reported incidents of serious behavioural issues and property damage have reduced over time; however, incidents are not always consistently reported. Student health and safety remains a significant concern.

Staff Capability and Consistency

The school has increased training and professional development opportunities. Staff report improved confidence in managing behaviour and intervening earlier. Despite these improvements, staff continue to feel underprepared to manage some students with highly complex needs. Student feedback indicates dissatisfaction with the school environment.

Specialist and Therapeutic Support

Access to external psychological and specialist services is limited and not automatic. The school does not routinely make external referrals or apply for additional support,

resulting in gaps in continuity of care before, during, and after enrolment. Mental health support is partially addressed through the Tuturu programme.

Philosophy of Care

The school has completed a review of its philosophy of care, adopting a trauma-informed and culturally responsive model based on Te Whare Tapa Whā. Implementation has begun through staff training and student engagement; however, consistent practice is not yet embedded.

Learning, Assessment, and Curriculum

Systems for tracking social and behavioural progress are in place; however, learning assessment and tracking are inconsistent. There is a disconnect between assessment information and teaching practice. Planning quality varies widely, incoming student information is often incomplete, and assessment data is not consistently used to inform individual education plans.

Prior to Term 4, 2025, teaching relied heavily on worksheets, with limited curriculum planning. Learning time is not maximised, and positive behaviour is often rewarded with time away from learning. The current curriculum is not fit for purpose, particularly for secondary-aged students.

Secondary-Aged Students

Students are not making sufficient progress in literacy or numeracy and are not meeting learning goals. Learning programmes do not adequately support successful transitions beyond Westbridge. The school is not accredited to offer the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), and staff lack capability to support the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) programmes. At the time of review, no students were enrolled with Te Kura, although some have since been re-enrolled.

Overall Concerns

ERO has significant concerns about the school's ability to meet students' educational, health, and wellbeing needs, including inconsistent access to specialist support, lack of a comprehensive therapeutic approach, poor transition planning, variable teaching quality, insufficient assessment and tracking, lack of NCEA accreditation, and ongoing health and safety risks.

Recommendation

ERO recommends that the Minister of Education consider closure of Westbridge Residential School under section 197 of the Education and Training Act 2020. ERO also recommends that the Ministry of Education take immediate steps to support current students by identifying alternative provision that better meets their educational, health, and wellbeing needs.