

## EPSOM NORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOL (ENPS)

We are a central-suburban contributing primary school on Auckland's isthmus with approximately 660 children identifying with 50 ethnic groups. The Board, community and staff are proud of the school's history, traditions, and research-based environment. ENPS has professional and academic links to local and international universities which have driven the school's exceptional and academic success. Inclusive and evaluative approaches support students to learn and bicultural practices are valued within a culture of innovation, respect and care.

### The Learning Philosophy of Epsom Normal Primary School

ENPS is a Normal school. As such, it serves as an exemplar for student teachers from undergraduate, and postgraduate programmes throughout New Zealand. We are a learning community committed to working collaboratively with university staff to ensure that our programmes reflect the most innovative and up-to-date developments in education research and practice.

Our school's philosophy is founded on promoting the holistic development of the child. Within this tradition, teaching and learning are viewed as a mutually respectful interactive process. Each child is encouraged and empowered to release their innate learning potential as they develop and grow. This approach is aptly reflected by the principals of 'ako' - representing mutuality in the teachers' and students' roles, such that the teacher is both teacher and learner, and the student likewise.

Intrinsic to our philosophy is the acknowledgement of the paramount importance of teacher-child relationships. These relationships are the foundation upon which educational experiences rest. Our teachers work to establish and sustain relationships within which children feel valued and respected in a climate that encourages creativity, experimentation, innovation, and critical thinking. Of vital importance is that we grow all of our students' unique strengths. Terms that we use to describe our teaching programmes include 'authentic', 'inspirational', 'optimistic', 'challenging', 'courageous', 'experimental', 'optimistic', and 'fun'; the principles of the NZ Curriculum.

At ENPS, we expect our teachers to be inspirational practitioners at the cutting edge of education research and practice. We believe that all children are entitled to experience a learning environment that ignites a passion for learning, challenges them to high levels of achievement, and inspires them to be optimistic and curious about their learning now and in the future. In describing our teachers, we use such terms as 'critical practitioners' and 'researchers' who keep up to date with current education theory and practice.

Our learning mantra, 'Together we are strong', and our whakatauki, 'Kia ngatahi ai te tu, e pakari ai te tuara', support our curriculum-design decisions.

### The Learning Priorities of Epsom Normal Primary School

#### Inclusiveness

We believe that students and staff at ENPS ought to live and work within an inclusive and respectful school community. Students at ENPS will develop a sense of belonging whilst acknowledging and valuing their cultural heritage, diversity, uniqueness, and creativity. We want all students to experience the support and unity of a caring, inclusive school community where everyone feels that they belong and can be successful.

ENPS programmes acknowledge the bicultural foundations of New Zealand and reflect the Treaty of Waitangi principles of participation, protection, and partnership. All students at ENPS have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of the Maori language and culture.

We live inclusiveness by encouraging our 'Student Voice' program where the children support others to actively share their own knowledge about the world and enabling them to participate in the process of making decisions about curriculum design in the school. Teachers with responsibilities in this area develop a programme each year to ensure that students' voices are heard.

We have exacting targets that stretch students, and specific targets for priority groups. Our Special Needs students are the responsibility of all the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the SLT support classroom teachers to develop programmes to meet the needs and strengths of special needs students. Teacher aides funded by the Special Education Grant follow an inclusive model, working predominantly in the classrooms to support teachers. When appropriate, students are withdrawn for additional support programmes. Students whose first language is not English are fully integrated into mainstream classrooms, as are all other students with learning differences. Our aim is to provide language-learning experiences that will enable these learners to effectively access the regular school curriculum.

A parent-consultation week is held during term three each year, and all parents are invited to view and discuss the school's learning programmes. Other discussion points include new curriculum initiatives and child-achievement aspirations. Each year, it is decided whether to meet in cultural groups, sector groups, or neighbourhood groups. During parent-consultation week, senior staff also consult with Maori parents.

### Being Empowered by Strengths

Teachers at Epsom encourage every child to learn about who he or she is and that they have their own unique strengths.

We live our strength focus through a 'Development of Talent (DOT)' programme which is premised on the belief that every child has unique talents and strengths that should be encouraged to flourish within the school environment. Teachers incorporate enrichment approaches, such as those of Renzulli and Howard Gardner, into their programmes. All students grow their strengths in the once-weekly DOT hour. Once a year, there is a school-wide 2-day event during which students have opportunities to develop their talents in focused workshops.

Building on the learning mantra 'Together we are strong' means team teaching is an ideal model for the sharing of teachers' strengths and expertise to lift us all. This collaborative approach is implemented at ENPS, where students benefit from having two inspirational teachers that they can establish relationships with, interact with, and learn with.

### The Creative

At ENPS we believe everyone is creative, and we develop teachers capable of creatively designing innovative learning programmes that will inspire students and generate high levels of enquiry, engagement, and success (Giles & Cavanagh-Eyre, 2012).

We live the creative by asking ourselves questions such as "What ideas can I generate?", "What possibilities can I explore?", "What ideas can I play with?", "What new connections can I make?", and "In what new ways can I express my thinking?"

When we create from a position of honesty, we engage, and we think deeply.

## The Critical

We believe that all our students should be able to examine critically the way that texts, symbols, and stories are constructed. At ENPS we believe inspirational teachers should empower students to think critically, as education should be a liberating process.

We live critical thought by encouraging our children to ask questions of themselves, such as “Where have these thoughts come from?”, “Is this the truth?”, “Have I put myself in somebody else’s shoes?” and “What are the consequences of this act?”

We hold in-depth professional dialogue, and source professional research and reading material to inform our planning, learning together, and teaching together.

## On being Future-Focused in Learning to Learn

At ENPS, we recognise that the world is complex, unpredictable, and rapidly changing. It is increasingly apparent that students will need to be creative, innovative, problem-solvers who can work in deep and collaborative ways with diverse ideas and people.

To prepare our students for their unknown futures, we aim to develop their knowledge of the different curriculum areas, as well as how these disciplines work at a systems level, for example what it means to think and work as a scientist, an artist, a social scientist, a mathematician, and so on. This forms the basis of the ‘I am’s’ discussed later.

ENPS seeks to provide authentic experiences where students can actively construct new knowledge with our school and local and national communities. These opportunities enable our students to work meaningfully in a knowledge-building capacity and to contribute and share with others.

## “I am a ...” at Epsom Normal Primary School

Embedded in the topic planning, the ‘I am’s’ give children the opportunity to walk and think as a given identity structure that exist in our communities. For example, students have investigated the social studies curriculum within the context of ‘I am a city councillor’ and the science curriculum through the ‘I am a chemist’ unit. Interacting with adults who have made specific career choices and developed specific personal strengths, students are able to take on these roles and experience how they could positively impact the world around them.

## The Treaty of Waitangi at Epsom Normal Primary School

ENPS learning programmes recognise the bicultural underpinning of Aotearoa New Zealand, as all students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Maori me ona tikanga. The ENPS whakatauki, ‘Kia ngatahi ai te tu, e pakari ai te tuara’, and learning mantra, ‘Together we are strong’, endorse the Treaty of Waitangi principles of participation, protection, and partnership.

## On Growing Great Teachers

A mentor teacher at ENPS is expected to model inspirational teaching to student teachers so they become reflective and critical practitioners capable of making links between the theory and the practical. A mentor builds on student teacher strengths so that they can develop an essence of who they are as a teacher.

Our mentor teachers are familiar with the specific practicum brief, and dialogue with student teachers regarding the philosophy, vision, values, learning mantra, and whakatauki of ENPS. They set high expectations of the student teacher, and stimulate in-depth dialogue with student teachers that is critical by making connections between the theory and practice.

Student teachers are invited to embrace all our different cultural groups with integrity, know their students’ strengths and design their programmes to develop their unique strengths including the planning of the ‘I am’s’, design and implement DOT workshops for students, and to be proactive in sharing their own strengths with the school.