



Morning Comment

End of Term 3 Assembly – Friday 19 September 2025

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Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari he toa takitini

My strength is not that of an individual but that of the collective.

This whakataukī draws parallels to the story of te reo Māori – a language that has survived not because of one person, but because of the determination of many.

I have been asked this morning to provide a few reflections in celebration of Māori Language Week.

This year is a significant milestone, marking 50 years since the first Māori Language Week in 1975. It also marks 50 years since the Māori Language Petition, signed by over 30,000 people, with the collective goals of having te reo Māori taught in schools,

increasing public awareness, and demonstrating the widespread use and application of the Māori language.

This petition was a turning point. Tangata whenua and supporters from all around Aotearoa took a stand for te reo – a movement which initiated the language's revitalisation. *Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi – it took the voices of many to demand change.*

In 1987, te reo was recognised as an official language of Aotearoa. Today, it continues to grow in strength, pride, and mana. However, the journey to this point has not always been easy. Through colonisation, Māori were punished in schools for speaking their own language. Laws and policies were put in place to suppress it, and to assimilate Māori into a European way of living. By the 1970s, experts were warning that te reo could die out within a single generation.

Imagine if, today as a country, we were suddenly dominated by another culture. Our language, our customs, the very things that make us who we are, stripped away.

Through those desperate times, tangata whenua all over the country took action, and the Māori Language Petition was created. This sparked other revitalisation movements like kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa – Māori-led education institutions.

The children who were raised through kōhanga reo in the 1980s are now parents and kaumātua, raising the next generation of te reo speakers. Today, Māori is alive: in our schools, on television, and even on the global stage, like the Rugby World Cup.

Yet, many people in Aotearoa still don't celebrate or embrace Māori language and culture. Ironically, when we travel overseas, our Māori culture is the very thing that makes us recognisably Kiwi. I've seen it myself – at sports matches, in pubs, or while travelling. New



Zealanders will proudly wear a pounamu or taonga, draw a moko on their face with a felt tip, perform their version of the haka, or simply greet each other with “kia ora.” Te reo Māori is unique to this country. It belongs to us, and it sets us apart from the rest of the world.

For me, the revitalisation of te reo Māori is personal, as I draw much of my mana from my whakapapa. My great great-grandmother, Hārata Ruruhe, was Ngāi Tūhoe. Her name, Hārata, translates to Charlotte in English. When I was born, my parents named me Charlotte, and my koro immediately began calling me Hārata, after my great great-grandmother. That's why, around kura (school), you might hear people call me by that name.

My great great-grandmother grew up in a time when success was measured by one's ability to embrace European norms. She was a proud Māori and fluent speaker, yet she prided herself on her adoption of the English language and ways of living. This reflects the wider social pressures to assimilate Māori. Through my dad's whānau in Wairoa, I have reconnected with my language and culture. I'll never forget sleeping on the marae for the first time, surrounded by whānau, welcomed with waiata and haka. Those moments strengthened my own sense of identity. It reminded me again: our strength comes from those around us.

To conclude, there is a whakataukī I would like to share:

Te manu e kai ana i te miro, nōna te ngahere; te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga, nōna te.
(The bird that feasts on the miro berry owns the forest; the bird that feasts on knowledge owns the world.)

I believe this whakataukī is true for all of us. Even if we embrace just one word, one mihi, one waiata, or one haka, we show intent and respect in extending our knowledge of taha Māori. We help keep te reo alive. And in doing so, we grow – as rangatahi and as tangata tiriti.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa.