



## Application form for new schools

### Instructions for applicants

This form is only for new school applications. If you are a converting school, please head to our website to find the appropriate information and forms.

### What you will need to provide

1. A written response to our assessment criteria in this document.
2. Adhere to the page limits and answer all questions.
3. Sign the application declaration at the end of this document.
4. If you have new governing members since completing your EOI, complete statutory declarations for all new governing members.
5. If you have any comments with regard to the draft contract, note in the section provided in this document.

### Submitting your application

1. Applications must be submitted electronically through the GETS e-Tender box function no later than midday; 12:00pm, 16 May 2025.
2. Please plan accordingly to allow sufficient time for the upload to complete before the application deadline. If you do encounter technical issues when you are submitting, please contact the applications team at [applications@charterschools.govt.nz](mailto:applications@charterschools.govt.nz).
3. Applications not submitted by the deadline time and date may be excluded from assessment at the discretion of the Charter School Agency.
4. Please clearly name your files as follows:
  - a. [Applicant/sponsor name – Application form for Charter Schools - Kura Hourua]
  - b. [Applicant/sponsor name – Statutory declaration for Charter Schools - Kura Hourua]

### Application process terms and conditions

This process is undertaken in accordance with the Charter School Agency application terms and conditions. By applying, the applicant agrees to the terms and conditions appended to this application.



Your application response is limited to **50 A4 pages (25 sheets)** including all appendices, cover pages, contents pages and blank pages but excluding CVs for Key Personnel, which are limited to one A4 page (one side of a sheet) each. The font size will be limited to no smaller than Arial size 10.

If you exceed the page limit, we will contact you to re-supply the document within the specified page limit. If you are unable to re-supply the document, the additional pages will be removed and will not be considered in the assessment.

### **Purpose and contribution**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate what drives the sponsor to establish their charter school and what impact and contribution the school will have on its students and the wider school network.

#### **Purpose**

1. What is your vision for education at your school and how does it relate to supporting young people?

#### **Vision Statement Autism New Zealand Education Hub (ANZEH)**

Our school will be based on sites in Auckland and Wellington and exists to provide transformative, inclusive, and flexible education for autistic and neurodivergent students who have struggled to engage in traditional schooling. We recognise that every learner is unique, and we are committed to fostering an environment where students feel safe, understood, and empowered to thrive.

Through a multi-engagement model—including face-to-face teaching, home-schooling support, online cohort learning, and community-based clusters—we offer a tailored, student-led approach that respects individual needs, strengths, and aspirations.

Grounded in evidence-based neurodivergent-affirming practices and supported by specialist educators, we aim to nurture confidence, autonomy, and a lifelong love of learning. By working in partnership with family/whānau, local communities, and Autism New Zealand, we strive to create a sustainable, culturally responsive educational model that champions inclusion and success for every student.

#### **Who We Support**

ANZEH is designed for autistic students and other neurodivergent learners from Year 9 and up who have found traditional schooling challenging. Our goal is to provide a safe, supportive, and empowering environment where they can reconnect with learning and thrive.

We are focused on delivering unique and bespoke pathways of learning based on students' interests, skills and needs. We will provide for a variety of options including and not limited to NCEA academic and vocational pathways as well as a core needs-based, neurodiversity affirming curriculum.

Our approach is tailored for students who:

- Experience School-Related Anxiety: Students who may struggle with the sensory, social, or academic demands of mainstream schooling, leading to heightened anxiety and avoidance.



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- **Face Academic Challenges:** Learners who may have gaps in their learning, difficulty keeping up with the curriculum, or need additional support to achieve academic success.
- **Have Disengaged or Are at Risk of Disengaging:** Learners who have withdrawn from traditional education environments due to feeling misunderstood, unsupported, or overwhelmed.
- **Require Personalised Learning Pathways:** Students who benefit from individualised education plans that accommodate their unique strengths, needs, and interests.
- **Thrive in Structured yet Flexible Settings:** Learners who do well with clear routines and expectations but also need adaptability in how, when, and where they learn.
- **Benefit from Strength-Based Approaches:** Students who need an environment that recognises and builds on their talents, passions, and capabilities rather than focusing on deficits.
- **Need a Multimodal Learning Experience:** Learners who engage best when offered a variety of educational pathways, including face-to-face, online, home-based, and community-based options.
- **Require Emotional and Wellbeing Support:** Students who may need additional support to manage anxiety, emotional regulation, and the social demands of education.

Our goal is simple: to reimagine education so that no neurodivergent learner is left behind—providing pathways to achievement, belonging, and a future filled with possibility.

## 2. What motivates you to establish this school as sponsor?

For over 50 years, Autism New Zealand has been the heart of the autism community, growing into a well-established organisation with a nationwide reach. We are driven by our unwavering commitment to the care, support, and advocacy of autistic people, evidenced by our extensive network and support of over 40,000 members of the community per year, with diverse services spanning early years to employment support and including everyday outreach and support, to professional development courses for educators, and involvement with international research projects.

Our motivation to establish this school as sponsor is born from decades of this very commitment, coupled with a deep frustration at the persistent gap in appropriate educational support for neurodivergent students. While we acknowledge the pressure on the education system has grown, and initiatives like the Learning Support Action Plan (whose tangible outcomes remain elusive) have been introduced, the fundamental need for differentiated teaching and an autistic-specific approach, clearly



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outlined in the Aotearoa -New Zealand - Autism Guidelines since 2008, has not been adequately met, particularly in secondary education.

For many, many years, we have tirelessly advocated for better educational outcomes, engaging with the Government, ministers, and the Ministry of Education, contributing to numerous reviews and initiatives and have provided structured professional development and individualised advice to teachers. Now, we see a pivotal opportunity to move beyond advocacy and directly enact the change we have long sought. Establishing this school allows us to proactively and directly guide and support a much-needed alternative educational pathway specifically designed for neurodivergent students to not just learn but truly succeed.

The 2023 review of Alternative Education further underscored the urgent need for a wider range of educational options and a new model that identifies and supports these learners. Our well-researched model represents precisely this much-needed alternative, offering a significantly different approach for students whose needs are not being met within the current system.

3. What are the key educational features of your proposed charter school | kura hourua including (but not limited to):

- Secondary qualification system (if applicable)
- Cultural approaches (bilingualism etc)
- Curriculum approach

The ANZEH is a groundbreaking Charter School designed to empower autistic and neurodivergent students. We provide a flexible, inclusive learning environment tailored for students year 9+ who struggle with traditional schooling due to anxiety, sensory sensitivities, social-emotional challenges, and unique academic needs. Many of these students are at risk of disengaging — or have already disengaged — from traditional education due to their unique neurodivergent needs. Our approach is individualised, specific, and built on true partnerships—bringing together students, families/whānau, teachers, and specialists to create meaningful, supportive pathways for success.

### **Our Unique Learning Approach**

ANZEH offers a multi-engagement model that provides diverse pathways to education, ensuring that each student can access the type of learning environment that best suits their needs, strengths, and preferences. This approach is designed to be flexible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of neurodivergent learners, particularly those who are autistic.

#### **Face-to-Face Teaching**

In our face-to-face teaching model, students are provided with a structured classroom setting designed to meet their individual learning needs. With small student-to-staff ratios, we can tailor the learning experience for each student, ensuring that they receive the attention and support they need. The learning environment is calm, supportive, and predictable, allowing students to engage at their own pace and feel comfortable. The focus is on fostering academic progress, emotional regulation, and social skills, with the guidance of specialist educators who understand the unique needs of autistic students. This in-person



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model offers students the chance to practice essential life skills in a controlled setting, building the foundation for more independent learning.

#### **Online Cohort Teaching**

Online cohort teaching offers students the opportunity to connect with their peers and specialist educators in a structured virtual environment. Students are grouped into cohorts for specific subjects and projects, which allows them to engage in collaborative learning while still benefiting from a flexible and personalised approach. This model is ideal for students who thrive in digital environments, providing them with access to specialised resources and a wider network of peers. The virtual format ensures that students are still part of a learning community, even if they are geographically distant or unable to attend in-person sessions regularly. The online classes are structured and guided by experienced educators, and they encourage teamwork, communication, and academic development.

#### **Home-Schooling Support**

To support students with significant anxiety needs ANZEH offers a limited home-schooling option focused on creating a supportive pathway to face-to-face engagement, with the goal of reintegration into cohort learning. This personalised approach includes teaching assistance, resources, and expert guidance, enabling families to provide tailored and effective education at home when and as needed.

#### **Regular Clustering**

Regular clustering allows students to meet in smaller groups once or twice a week to learn together, fostering both academic and social development. These group sessions provide an opportunity for students to practice social skills, collaborate on projects, and build relationships with their peers in a supportive environment. While the focus is on social interaction and personal growth, the sessions are designed to be academically enriching as well. Clustering is a flexible model that can be adapted based on the needs of each student, and it can complement other forms of learning, such as online or home-based education. Over time, it is hoped that these clusters will support students back into face-to-face teaching and integrating into the broader school community as they develop confidence and independence.

#### **Pedagogical Approach**

This model is grounded in student-centered autistic pedagogy, which means that the learning experiences are tailored to the specific needs, abilities, and interests of each student. We prioritise a strengths-based approach, recognising the unique talents and potential of neurodivergent learners while addressing areas where support is needed. The learning environment is highly structured yet flexible, ensuring that students can thrive in ways that suit their individual learning styles.

The staff-to-student ratio in all learning environments is kept low to ensure that each student receives the necessary attention and support. Our team of highly trained professionals includes educators, psychologists, specialists and learning support workers who work together to provide multi-professional support. This ensures that students have access to a holistic and integrated approach to education that addresses not only academic learning but also social, emotional, and behavioural needs.

#### **Real-World Learning**

At ANZEH, we believe in the power of real-world learning. Our approach equips students with the skills and scaffolding they need to navigate future challenges, both in education and in life. Whether through



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structured face-to-face classes, online cohorts, or home-schooling support, our goal is to help students build confidence, independence, and resilience. This will enable them to participate fully in their communities and succeed in whatever path they choose after their education at ANZEH.

### **Curriculum and Pathways**

Our curriculum is designed to be adaptive and future-focused, offering a rich and diverse range of learning experiences tailored to the strengths and needs of neurodivergent learners. It includes:

#### **Core Academic Subjects:**

- Mathematics and Numeracy, English and Literacy, Sciences, and key STEM subjects, taught with adaptive strategies and a focus on real-world application.
- Emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning to foster intellectual curiosity.
- Interdisciplinary projects that integrate multiple subjects to deepen understanding and engagement.
- Flexible pacing and differentiated instruction to cater to diverse learning profiles and ensure mastery of core concepts.

#### **Outdoor Education:**

- Extensive opportunities for outdoor learning through partnerships with Adventure Works, an NZQA-accredited outside provider.
- Programmes designed to build life skills, teamwork, environmental awareness, and resilience.
- Opportunities to earn recognised qualifications or certifications in outdoor education and related areas.

#### **Arts Education:**

- Access to a wide range of creative disciplines, including visual arts, music, drama, and digital design.
- Integration of therapeutic approaches, such as music therapy or art therapy, to support emotional well-being.
- Opportunities for students to showcase their work through exhibitions, performances, and digital portfolios.



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#### **Life Skills and Vocational Training:**

- Occupational therapy support, practical life skills and self-advocacy learning, including financial literacy, cooking, digital literacy, and personal organisation.
- Job readiness programmes, including CV writing, interview skills, and workplace expectations.
- Partnerships with local businesses and organisations to provide work experience and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Micro-credentials and short courses offering industry-relevant skills and certifications.

#### **Qualifications and Pathways:**

- NCEA (with a focus on Literacy and Numeracy) and alternative education qualifications through the New Zealand Qualifications Framework.
- Possible dual enrolment with Te Kura for NCEA specific content, with ANZEH providing dedicated learning coaches and tutors providing individualised support.
- Exploration of international qualifications and industry-specific certifications to widen future opportunities.

#### **Individualised Learning Plans (ILPs):**

- The integration of Te Whare Tapa Whā, recognising that holistic well-being is crucial for learning and success. By integrating this model, our educators can create a supportive and culturally responsive learning environment that addresses the physical, mental, social, and spiritual needs of students.
- ILPs are central to the commitment of family/whānau, school and students in the planning, direction, and content of the learning programme, as well as being a significant measurement of success in our students' learning.
- Personalised ILPs are designed around each student's unique needs, strengths, and interests.
- Collaborative development of ILPs involving students, family/whānau, and teaching staff.
- Regular review and adaptation of plans to ensure ongoing alignment with students' evolving skills, goals and aspirations.
- Opportunities for students to lead their own passion projects, guided by mentors and subject specialists.



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#### **Community-Based and Real-World Learning:**

- Strong partnerships with local iwi, community organisations, businesses, and social enterprises.
- Service-learning projects that allow students to give back to their communities while building practical skills.
- Entrepreneurial education, enabling students to develop and manage their own small-scale projects or businesses.
- Real-world experiences through internships, mentorships, and collaborative community initiatives.

#### **Community, Whānau and Cultural Engagement**

We work closely with families, caregivers, iwi, and local organisations to ensure students receive the best possible support. Whānau involvement is at the heart of our approach, recognising that strong, collaborative culturally inclusive partnerships between home and school lead to better outcomes for our students. We believe in listening deeply to whānau voices and respecting and incorporating their knowledge of their child's strengths, needs, and aspirations.

Central to this relationship is our combined effort in developing and agreeing to the Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The ILP is a living document, co-constructed and regularly reviewed by students, whānau, educators, and specialists ensuring it reflects the evolving needs and goals of each student. By embedding cultural values and whānau perspectives into the ILP process, we create a truly personalised and holistic educational journey.

The establishment of ANZEH represents a vital step toward creating equitable, inclusive education for autistic learners and other neurodivergent rangatahi who have historically been underserved by mainstream systems. Central to this kaupapa is a deep commitment to working in partnership with Māori communities, recognising the unique strengths, values, and aspirations of whānau, hapū, and iwi. ANZEH understands that culturally grounded, relational approaches are essential for fostering trust, belonging, and sustained engagement. The role of the ANZEH Kaiārahi is pivotal in this journey — acting as a navigator, connector, and advocate who ensures that Māori perspectives, tikanga, and mātauranga are embedded in every layer of the school's design and delivery. The Kaiārahi supports whānau voice in planning, helps build authentic relationships, and upholds the mana of each learner and their whānau, guiding the school to be truly responsive and mana-enhancing.

We recognise the importance of engaging meaningfully with Pacific peoples and have vast experience in working with people from a wide range of ethnicities. Pacific students and their families bring rich cultural knowledge and diverse perspectives, which we honour and integrate into our school's environment and practices. Through consultation and partnership with Pacific and wide-ranging ethnic community leaders and organisations, we aim to develop culturally responsive approaches that respect language, identity, and values. This engagement helps foster a sense of belonging and ensures that all students see their heritage and experiences reflected in their learning environment.



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Our commitment to inclusive and culturally responsive engagement means providing opportunities for regular dialogue, open feedback, and collaborative decision-making. We host community hui, fono, and informal gatherings to maintain strong relationships, build trust, and celebrate the achievements of our students together. By working alongside whānau and community partners, we ensure our students receive the wraparound support they need to thrive both in school and beyond.

#### 4. Why is this important for the community (including communities of interest)?

The ANZEH represents a bold and much-needed step forward in how we support neurodivergent learners in Aotearoa. Autism New Zealand has long been a trusted advocate, trainer, and support provider in the education sector, working alongside schools, families, and professionals to improve outcomes for autistic and neurodivergent students. This initiative builds on that deep foundation of experience and responds directly to growing evidence that the current system does not serve all learners equitably.

ERO reviews of alternative education models — including the 2023 evaluation — have highlighted a clear rationale for change, emphasising the need to create more inclusive, flexible, and responsive pathways for learners who are disengaged or excluded from traditional schooling. This school answers that call, offering an innovative model that is student-centred, trauma-informed, and rooted in strong community partnerships.

**For neurodivergent learners and their family/whānau**, the school offers an environment where difference is not just accommodated but embraced. With multiple modes of engagement — including face-to-face teaching, home-based learning, online cohort participation, and regular n-person clusters — the school meets students where they are, both physically and emotionally. This can dramatically reduce anxiety, restore trust in education, and allow students to flourish in their own time and way.

**For the wider community**, this school serves as a practical demonstration of what inclusion can look like. It invites collaboration between educators, support services, families, and the disability sector to co-design learning pathways that are holistic and culturally responsive. Recognising the chronic underemployment faced by many autistic adults, this approach aims to provide students with the skills and support necessary for successful transitions into meaningful employment and adulthood. The long-term benefits include stronger community cohesion, reduced social isolation, and better transitions into adulthood for students who are often overlooked in mainstream settings.

**For communities of interest — especially iwi, disability organisations, and educational leaders —** the Charter School offers a unique opportunity to shape a future-facing model of education. A strong Te Ao Māori perspective is woven through the school's design and delivery, supporting tino rangatiratanga and ensuring that Māori whānau feel heard, respected, and central to the kaupapa. Autism New Zealand is committed to collaborating with local iwi and providing culturally responsive pathways with proven success in enabling access for whānau Māori who wouldn't have otherwise approached us. The kaiarahi in our diagnostic service supported whanaungatanga and a mana-enhancing approach to diagnosis where Te Tiriti and Māori heritage were honoured.



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In essence, ANZEH is not just an educational alternative — it's a community response to systemic gaps, grounded in compassion, equity, and the belief that every learner deserves a place where they can belong and succeed.

### Contribution

5. How will this support parental choice or enhance the learning opportunity for families/whānau?

The Autism New Zealand Education Hub (ANZEH) is designed to give families real, meaningful choice in their tamariki's education — especially for those who have historically been left with few, if any, suitable options. For many parents and family/whānau of autistic and neurodivergent tamariki, mainstream schooling can feel like a constant battle — not because of their child's ability or potential, but because the system often isn't set up to understand or support their unique ways of learning and being.

#### **ANZEH empowers parents and whānau in several keyways:**

- **Flexible pathways:** By offering a multi-engagement model — including face-to-face learning, online cohorts, home-based support, and small group gatherings — families can choose the mode of learning that best suits their child's needs, temperament, and current situation. This flexibility supports family/whānau to remain engaged and involved without compromising their child's well-being or learning.
- **Genuine collaboration:** Families are not just observers in their child's education but active partners. The ANZEH approach values the lived expertise of parents and caregivers, working alongside them to co-create learning plans that reflect the strengths, interests, and aspirations of each learner.
- **Consistent support:** Many family/whānau of neurodivergent tamariki report feeling isolated and unsupported. ANZEH is committed to providing wraparound services — including access to trained facilitators, allied professionals, and peer networks — to ensure families feel heard, held, and part of a connected learning community.
- **Culturally grounded choices:** With a strong commitment to Te Ao Māori and culturally sustaining practice, the school offers learning experiences that reflect the identities and values of diverse communities. This creates an affirming space for Māori and Pacific whānau, and those from other cultural backgrounds, to see their ways of knowing and being reflected in the educational environment.

Ultimately, ANZEH enhances learning opportunities by centring students and family/whānau in every decision and by creating an educational model that is not about fitting students into a system but about building a system around their needs. It opens doors to learning that is joyful, relevant, and sustainable for students, and for the families walking alongside them.



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6. How will the school positively impact its students and contribute to the wider school network / education sector?

The Autism New Zealand Education Hub (ANZEH) will have a profound impact not only on the students it serves directly but also on the broader educational landscape in Aotearoa.

#### **Positive Impact on Students:**

- Personalised, strengths-based learning: Students will experience an education that is tailored to their individual strengths, needs, interests, and communication styles, not forced into a one-size-fits-all model. This promotes confidence, competence, and genuine engagement with learning.
- Restoring trust in education: Many of ANZEH's students and family/whānau may arrive having experienced school trauma, exclusion, or prolonged non-attendance. The school provides a nurturing, affirming space where relationships come first and trust is rebuilt over time, leading to stronger long-term learning outcomes.
- Development of life skills and self-advocacy: Alongside academic learning, students will be supported to build executive functioning, communication, emotional regulation, and self-advocacy skills all essential for transitioning into adulthood, employment, and community participation.
- Sense of belonging and identity: By fostering inclusive, culturally grounded environments that honour neurodiversity, the school supports students in developing a positive sense of identity and belonging, both within themselves and within their communities.

#### **Contribution to the Wider School Network / Education Sector:**

- Innovative practice and professional learning: ANZEH will serve as a centre of excellence and innovation for inclusive and neurodiversity-informed education. Its models and methods including multi-engagement learning, family/whānau partnership, and trauma-informed practice will provide valuable learning for other schools seeking to become more inclusive.
- Sector collaboration and capability-building: Through partnerships, training, and mentoring, ANZEH will contribute to raising the capability of educators across the country. Teachers, teacher aides, and school leaders will benefit from shared tools, insights, and approaches developed through the school's practice.
- Evidence-informed development: With a commitment to evaluation and reflection, ANZEH will contribute to a growing body of local evidence about what works for neurodivergent learners in New Zealand contexts. This will help inform wider policy and curriculum development.



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- **Systemic influence and leadership:** By demonstrating what is possible when education is designed around the learner rather than requiring the learner to adapt to the system ANZEH will influence conversations and decisions at regional and national levels. It challenges the status quo and opens the door for broader reforms toward inclusive education.

### Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate a comprehensive business plan with detailed strategies to deliver on academic objectives.

#### Financial acuity

1. Provide an indication of your financial viability through a profit/loss (P and L), cash flow and balance sheet for each year of your first three years of operation.

Please refer to attached documentation.

2. Describe strategies to ensure long-term financial sustainability, including plans for financial oversight and accountability.

#### Financial Sustainability Strategy:

Our approach to long-term financial sustainability is centred on strategic planning, operational efficiency, careful risk management, and partnership leverage. The following core strategies will support our ongoing viability:

- **Lean Infrastructure Model:** By reducing reliance on costly capital developments and instead operating through leased spaces, shared facilities, and community partnerships, we avoid significant fixed costs and maintain flexibility to scale up or down as needed.
- **Blended Delivery Efficiency:** Our hybrid approach allows us to serve diverse learners across multiple regions without needing large campuses, significantly lowering overhead while increasing reach and enrolment potential.
- **Shared Services through Autism New Zealand:** Leveraging Autism New Zealand's central finance, HR, procurement, and compliance infrastructure significantly reduces duplication and administrative burden, allowing for centralised and cost-effective service delivery.
- **Phased Staffing and Roll Growth:** Staffing will scale with confirmed enrolments and funding availability, ensuring we never exceed our operational capacity. This approach supports sustainability as demand grows steadily.



**Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets**

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- Diversified Income Streams: While government funding will form our core revenue, we also plan to pursue:
  - Philanthropic grants and corporate partnerships
  - Professional development offerings for other schools and services
  - Accessing equity-based funding where applicable for high-need learners

**Financial Oversight and Accountability:**

To ensure robust financial governance, we will implement the following:

- Centralised financial management via Autism New Zealand's experienced Finance and Business Team, managed by an experienced senior manager and chartered accountant. This team will:
  - Manage payroll, budgeting, forecasting, invoicing, and reporting
  - Monitor funding use against allocation
  - Develop and monitor the ANZEH business plan
  - Ensure adherence to Public Finance Act and Ministry guidelines
- Governance-level financial scrutiny: The Board of Governors (including representatives from Autism New Zealand, education leaders, and financial specialists) will:
  - Receive and review monthly and financial reports
  - Oversee the school's financial strategy and reserves
  - Ensure all spending aligns with long-term sustainability goals
- Annual independent audit: We will commission an external audit to ensure transparency and compliance with funding conditions and regulatory requirements.
- Contingency planning: A minimum of 10% of our annual budget will be reserved as an operational contingency to manage fluctuations in enrolment or unexpected expenses.



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- Performance monitoring: We will regularly review financial performance against enrolment targets, staffing ratios, and delivery costs, adjusting in real-time where necessary.

These strategies position the school not only for a successful launch but for enduring operational sustainability, even as we expand to meet wider demand in future years.

#### Workforce

3. Estimate the number and types of staff required (e.g., registered teachers, LATS, administrative staff).

For the initial roll of approximately 90+ students, we anticipate a team of around 15–17 staff across both Auckland and Wellington, including the following roles:

- **1 Principal Leader** (school-wide oversight and vision implementation likely - Auckland)
- **1 Regional/Deputy Team Lead** (responsible for day-to-day operations and staff leadership - Wellington)
- **7 Registered Teachers** (delivering the core curriculum and overseeing individual learning plans room for two LATs if necessary and up to standard)
- **4 Learning Assistant Facilitators (LAFs)** – specialist paraprofessionals supporting students' daily learning and wellbeing, both online and in person
- **1 Kaiārahi / Cultural Navigators** - supporting engagement with Māori learners and whānau
- **1 Inclusive Practice Coordinator** – managing complex needs, transitions, and support plans
- **Administration and Enrolment Support Staff** – based within Autism New Zealand's infrastructure, supporting enrolment, communication, and logistics
- **1 ICT and Digital Learning Support** – maintaining and optimising the online learning environment
- **Access to specialist support:** (e.g., SLT, OT, psychologists) will be provided through contracted partnerships or existing Autism New Zealand relationships, not as full-time staff initially.

This team will scale over time as student numbers grow, and we will review staffing capacity annually.



**Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate a comprehensive business plan with detailed strategies to deliver on academic objectives.

4. Highlight qualifications and experience needed for key positions.

**Principal Leader:** New Zealand Registered Teacher with a current practising certificate, a postgraduate qualification in educational leadership or similar, and extensive experience in inclusive education, preferably with a background in autism or neurodivergent learners. Proven ability to lead dispersed teams and manage complex systems.

**Regional/Deputy Team Lead:** New Zealand Registered Teacher with a current practising certificate and significant leadership experience within educational settings. A strong understanding of inclusive education principles, curriculum implementation, and staff supervision is essential. Experience in managing remote teams or leading in a distributed model would be highly beneficial.

**Team Leads / Registered Teachers:** Current NZ teacher registration, with strong understanding of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), trauma-informed practice, and differentiated instruction. Previous experience with online learning or hybrid models is advantageous.

**Learning and Autism Facilitators (LAFs):** Not required to be registered teachers, but will have relevant tertiary training in education, social work, psychology, or disability support. Lived experience or strong working knowledge of autism is highly valued.

**Kaiārahi / Cultural Navigators:** Deep knowledge of Te Ao Māori, established relationships with iwi and Māori communities, and experience working in education or social service settings. Fluency in te reo Māori is preferred.

**Inclusive Practice Coordinator:** Specialist teachers or educational psychologists with a background in neurodiverse support, ORS coordination, and ILP development.

**Administration and Enrolment Support and ICT (Autism New Zealand Oversight):** While Autism New Zealand provides oversight and management for these crucial functions, including financial accountability through their Chartered Accountant Manager, staff within these roles will work collaboratively to ensure efficient operations. A strong understanding of digital systems, privacy protocols, and accessibility is essential to support the diverse needs of the learning environment.

5. Describe retention programs and professional development opportunities.

Staff retention is a key strategic priority and will be supported through a combination of wellbeing-focused culture, professional growth, and strong values alignment.

**Our retention plan includes:**

- Ongoing autism-specific training delivered in partnership with Autism New Zealand and other specialist providers
- Regular wānanga and PLD days, including space for reflection, team-building, and cultural capacity building



**Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate a comprehensive business plan with detailed strategies to deliver on academic objectives.

- Supervision and peer mentoring for both teachers and LAFs to prevent isolation or burnout
- Clear professional pathways into leadership, specialist roles, and curriculum development
- Workload monitoring and support systems, especially for those supporting high-complexity students or distance learners
- Staff input into curriculum and delivery model evolution to maintain a sense of ownership and relevance
- Connection to a national community of practice, particularly in the autism and inclusive education space

We are dedicated to fostering a values-driven, human-centred workplace where every staff member feels seen, supported, and celebrated. We believe that exceptional education begins with exceptional people. Furthermore, we recognize our role in cultivating future leaders in this field, thereby contributing to a stronger national workforce as we grow.

**Assets**

6. List the physical assets required (e.g., buildings, classrooms, sports facilities) and outline the plan for acquiring, developing, or leasing these assets.

As a hybrid model focused on flexible delivery, our physical infrastructure needs differ from traditional schools. However, to support face-to-face elements, we will secure:

- Two modestly sized anchor campuses in Auckland and Wellington, housing administrative hubs, resource storage, and spaces for:
  - Collaborative face-to-face teaching
  - 1:1 student and family/whānau meetings
  - Professional development
  - Wellbeing and therapy spaces
- Flexible-use classrooms and workshop rooms, potentially within community hubs or co-located education facilities



**Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate a comprehensive business plan with detailed strategies to deliver on academic objectives.

- Shared-use outdoor spaces or recreation partnerships, rather than stand-alone sports facilities
- Safe, welcoming breakout spaces for sensory regulation and quiet time

We are currently in discussions with potential partners, including Autism New Zealand's existing property resources and trusted lease providers, to ensure lease or license-to-occupy agreements are secured by the end of 2025.

7. Demonstrate how you will operationalise the property and infrastructure components of your application, ready to welcome students for Term One 2026.

- We will finalise site selection by October 2025, allowing time for minor refurbishments, fit-out, and accessibility checks.
- IT and digital infrastructure will be installed by December 2025 to support blended and distance learning.
- Health and safety compliance checks (e.g., fire, emergency, accessibility) will be completed in early 2026.
- Furniture and learning space setup will occur in Term 1, 2026, ready for our Term 2 student start.
- Each site will have a designated site manager, supported by Autism New Zealand's national facilities coordinator.

We are working with property and education planning consultants to ensure readiness aligns with ERO and Ministry of Education expectations.

8. Demonstrate how you will maintain your property and infrastructure within the funding allocation you will receive.

Lean, purpose-fit facilities: We will avoid unnecessary capital expenditure by leasing shared or adaptable spaces.

Maintenance schedules: Routine cleaning, minor repairs, and safety checks will be budgeted through our operational plan and executed via contracted services.

Leveraging partnerships: We will continue to access Autism New Zealand's nationwide infrastructure (e.g., offices, training venues) to supplement school site needs.



**Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate a comprehensive business plan with detailed strategies to deliver on academic objectives.

Proactive resource management: Repairs, replacements, and upgrades will be part of annual reviews to ensure fiscal responsibility.

9. Detail any equipment and infrastructure needed for online and blended learning environments.

- Student laptops or tablets with headphones and webcams
- Secure learning management system (LMS) to host content, track progress, and foster interaction
- Video conferencing tools with breakout, whiteboard, and accessibility features
- Learning analytics and engagement monitoring tools
- Teacher technology kits, including laptops, document cameras, microphones, and software licenses
- Accessible platform design, allowing neurodiverse learners to navigate content with ease

All systems will be privacy-compliant and user-tested for students with diverse communication and sensory needs.

10. Discuss plans for ensuring all students have access to necessary technology and, if applicable, still meeting necessary supervision requirements.

Device loan scheme: We will offer loan devices to families who require them, along with technical support and training.

Internet access support: We will assist with data plans or WiFi solutions as needed, prioritising equity.

Tech orientation: Students and family/whānau will receive support with setting up devices, using platforms, and establishing daily routines.

For students under 16:

- Learning agreements will include supervision expectations
- LAFs and teachers will check in regularly to confirm safe learning environments
- Where supervision is not possible at home, we will work with families to facilitate learning at community hubs or partner spaces



**Business planning – Finance, workforce and assets**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate a comprehensive business plan with detailed strategies to deliver on academic objectives.

11. Describe any cultural assets or approaches integral to the learning environment.

Culturally responsive physical spaces, such as pou or whakairo in entryways, bilingual signage, and safe spaces for cultural practices

Kaiārahi / cultural navigator overseeing both sites, ensuring tikanga Māori and kaupapa are embedded daily

Wānanga-style gatherings with kai, karakia, and whanaungatanga

Cultural narratives and pūrākau incorporated into curriculum themes

Close partnership with iwi to co-design elements of school space and practice

12. Explain how any cultural values and practices will be incorporated into the school's culture and curriculum.

- We are committed to mana ōrite mō te mātauranga Māori, ensuring Māori worldviews and pedagogies are treated with equal status.
- Our curriculum will include Te Ao Māori perspectives across all subjects, not just isolated Māori content.
- Tikanga will inform daily routines (e.g., karakia, mihi, hui processes).
- Localised curriculum design will be shaped with iwi and hapū involvement in each region.
- Ongoing professional development in Te Tiriti-based practice and culturally sustaining education will be core to all staff roles.
- Māori learners and whānau will be engaged through ongoing kaupapa Māori planning groups to keep practice authentic and grounded.



### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

### Experience and knowledge

1. Describe your experience and knowledge of the New Zealand schooling system and how this will enable you to effectively operate a charter school which will lift achievement and attendance for New Zealand students.

ANZEH will lift student achievement and attendance by creating an environment where autistic and neurodivergent learners feel safe, understood, and motivated. Key strategies include individualised learning plans tailored to strengths and interests, multi-modal engagement approaches (including visual supports, technology, and interest-based projects), and flexible pathways that integrate home-based, online, and in-person learning. Predictable routines, sensory-aware environments, and trauma-informed practice will support attendance, while strong whānau partnerships and the inclusion of Māori and neurodivergent perspectives will ensure relevance and belonging. Staff will be trained in neuro-affirming strategies that prioritise relationship, autonomy, and meaningful participation, all proven drivers of sustained engagement and progress.

Autism New Zealand has established itself as a cornerstone in providing robust educational programmes and professional development opportunities for teachers and support staff across Aotearoa. Autism New Zealand's commitment to evidence-based training ensures that educators receive professional development rooted in the most current research and effective methodologies for supporting autistic individuals. Autism New Zealand has extensive expertise in working with schools and ECE centres and service staff include former teachers, deputy principals and SENCO's as well as Early Intervention Specialists, Educational Psychologists, and Speech Language Therapists. Educational programmes offered by Autism New Zealand include:

- Tilting the Seesaw, a programme that teaches strength-based strategies for the inclusion of autistic tamariki in primary school and home settings. It is a team-based approach with family/whānau and professionals working together to support autistic tamariki. This programme has been funded by the Ministry of Education since 2019 and delivers 35 programmes across Aotearoa each year. The programme has also been used to design specific professional development for Learning Support Coordinators and Teacher Aides and encompasses the Spiral of Enquiry methodology. The outcomes of this programme include:
  - Learning how to use the tamariki's strengths and interests to promote learning and communication
  - Learning how to implement consistent visual supports at home and at school
  - Learning how to implement stories for understanding at home and at school
  - Learning strategies for inclusion
  - Learning strategies for emotional regulation and reducing anxiety
  - Learning tools for behaviours that challenge
  - Planning for success by creating an action plan and goals



### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

- Early support programmes in Wellington and Auckland. These programmes provide the earliest possible support for pre-school aged tamariki and include:
  - EarlySteps – this programme has been funded by the Ministry of Education in Auckland since 2019. This programme is based on research in autism that has shown the value in engaging autistic tamariki in play and of using everyday activities as opportunities for learning. It has also shown that these tamariki learn better in their everyday regular environment. A core principle of the programme is that if we change the way adults engage and play with autistic tamariki, participation and engagement in play and learning situations will improve. The programme involves developing goals and an education programme and utilises video and in-person coaching.
  - Let's Play is a 10-week bridging programme to support autistic tamariki on a wait list in Auckland that is based on utilising play to support development.
  - Raupī te Raupō was developed and previously run by Victoria University Wellington and is being run in 2025 by Autism New Zealand in Wellington. It is a 10-week programme that aims to help family/whānau and family members better understand and support tamariki under the age of five to flourish.
- Framework for Autism in New Zealand (FANZ) is specifically designed for autistic people and their support networks across the lifespan, who want some understanding and practical strategies to enhance the lives and maximise the learning opportunities for those individuals.

Through workshops, online modules, and tailored programmes, these programmes equip professionals with the knowledge and skills to create inclusive and supportive learning environments. Furthermore, Autism New Zealand actively incorporates the valuable insights derived from the lived experiences of autistic people and their families, alongside community-informed best practices. These programmes and wealth of expertise will form the basis of training and ongoing professional development for all ANZEH staff.

Our initial ANZEH board possesses a comprehensive understanding of the New Zealand schooling system, which will be instrumental in effectively operating a charter school designed to boost both achievement and attendance for New Zealand students.

**James Le Marquand (Board Chair, Autism New Zealand)** brings 25 years of significant experience as a specialist school principal, notably leading Ko Taku Reo Deaf Education as its inaugural executive principal. He is a seasoned expert in individualised learning, fostering inclusive environments, and supporting the diverse needs of students, particularly those who find mainstream schooling challenging. His in-depth knowledge of the New Zealand curriculum, assessment practices, and government policies such as "Teaching the Basics Brilliantly" and attendance initiatives, coupled with years of proven leadership within principals' associations and his direct links with Autism New Zealand (providing a specific understanding of autistic learners), makes him exceptionally well-placed to establish the school's vision, build a strong team, and implement effective strategies to improve student outcomes. James holds a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership.



### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

**Dane Dougan (Chief Executive, Autism New Zealand)** has spearheaded Autism New Zealand for over 11 years, during which time the organisation has doubled in size and significantly expanded its educational provisions. Dane led the establishment and development of Australasia's first Autism Resource Centre in Petone. He has also overseen the creation of new educational programmes and the delivery of early years support within Autism New Zealand. Dane holds a Master's in Management Studies and a Graduate Diploma in Professional Accounting.

**Dr Larah van de Meer (Research and Advocacy Manager, Autism New Zealand)** leads the Neuro-Affirming Practices portfolio within Autism New Zealand. She has directed and contributed to numerous national research projects for Autism New Zealand, encompassing both national and international studies. Larah has ensured that all services and support are universally designed in collaboration with the autistic community and continues to work alongside autistic individuals to oversee the ongoing development of terminology guidelines. Larah also manages and leads the Autism New Zealand advisory groups, bringing valuable research insights into neurodiversity and effective support strategies.

**Amanda August (Business Manager, Autism New Zealand)** has been involved in the leadership of Autism New Zealand since 2017. Amanda is a Chartered Accountant who brings a strong business and financial acumen to the support structure for the charter school. She currently manages and supports the internal functions of Autism New Zealand, including finance, IT and HR. Amanda has previous auditor experience including school audits and is experienced in setting up new systems and processes. Her oversight ensures the financial acuity of ANZEH.

As the sponsoring organisation, Autism New Zealand provides crucial support and expertise:

- **Specialist Autism Knowledge:** Ensuring the school's practices are neurodivergent-affirming and grounded in best practices for autistic learners, including tailored teaching methodologies, sensory considerations, and communication strategies.
- **Financial and Business Oversight:** Providing the legal and financial framework, managing funding, overseeing governance, and ensuring compliance through their established infrastructure.
- **Tailored Student Support Resources:** Leveraging their network and resources to contribute to individualised student support services, potentially offering access to specialists and connections within the autism community to enhance student engagement and success.

**Summary:** Capitalising on James's extensive educational expertise, Dane's organisational leadership skills, Larah's research psychology insights, and Amanda's business and financial acumen, this Autism New Zealand leadership team provides a robust and multifaceted support structure, ensuring a strong footing for the charter school's success.



#### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

#### Governance and leadership

2. What is the governance structure for the school? How will the structure support your workforce and operations to achieve excellent academic and attendance outcomes?

ANZEH is governed under the umbrella of Autism New Zealand, leveraging their established infrastructure, national credibility, and deep expertise in supporting the autistic community.

At the heart of our governance is the ANZEH Board, which includes representation from the education sector, autism specialists, the autistic community, Autism New Zealand, and family/whānau. The ANZEH Board holds responsibility for strategic direction, operational oversight, and educational outcomes. It includes the ANZEH Principal as an ex officio member to ensure strong alignment between governance and leadership.

A key component of our governance model is the Autism New Zealand Financial and Business Team, which provides financial guidance and accountability. As shown in the attached diagram, this team:

- Supports both the ANZEH Board and the Education Hub directly,
- Receives reports from the ANZEH Board and Education Hub,
- Ensures transparency and compliance with financial regulations and best practices.

The overall structure ensures clear lines of communication, delegation, and support between:

- The Autism New Zealand Board (ultimate accountability),
- The ANZEH Board (operational and strategic governance),
- The Financial Oversight Team, and
- The Education Hub staff and operations.

This integrated model:

- Enables high-quality leadership and staff support,
- Prioritises policy development and professional training before the school opens in Term 2, 2026, and





### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

Key operational support is provided by the Autism New Zealand Financial Oversight Team, which manages:

- Finance and compliance
- HR and payroll
- Staff recruitment and development
- Information and student management systems

This integrated model enables the school's leadership and staff to stay focused on teaching, relationships, and responsive learning environments—essential drivers of engagement and success.

Families will be drawn to ANZEH for its inclusive ethos, flexible learning pathways, and reputation for genuine care and capability. Our structure ensures a seamless foundation for strong enrolment, consistent attendance, and excellent academic outcomes.

4. Describe your leadership structure including the academic leadership team. Consider the key responsibilities of your teaching workforce in relation to the students and how this will be operationalised day to day.

The ANZEH will be led by a Principal Leader, appointed by the end of 2025, who will oversee the strategic, academic, and cultural direction of the school. The Principal Leader will be supported by a Senior Leadership Team (SLT), progressively appointed through late 2025 and early 2026, to ensure strong systems are in place ahead of the school's opening in Term 2, 2026.

The SLT will include:

- A Deputy Principal (or equivalent) responsible for curriculum, NCEA, pedagogy, and learning support and literacy and numeracy programmes
- A Student Engagement Lead overseeing wellbeing, attendance, and connection as well as managing specialist team and any dual tuition processes
- A Kaiārahi or cultural lead to ensure our practices are grounded in Te Ao Māori. This person will also take on community engagement leadership and cultural programming as well as having a strong teaching presence.



### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

- A Learning Systems and Operations Lead to manage timetabling, resource allocation, and digital systems and ILP oversight.

This structure allows for shared leadership, ensuring day-to-day decisions remain learner-focused, culturally responsive, and operationally smooth.

### Teaching Workforce and Daily Practice

We envisage that ANZEH's teaching team will be highly skilled, autism-informed educators, supported by learning facilitators and specialists. Their core responsibilities include:

- Delivering flexible, individualised learning plans, responsive to each student's needs and learning profile
- Building strong, trust-based relationships with students and family/whānau to foster belonging and engagement
- Monitoring progress and attendance, using our information systems to inform daily adaptations
- Collaborating across delivery modes—face-to-face, online, and home-based learning—to maintain continuity and connection
- Embedding a culture of co-regulation, structure, and predictability throughout the day

Each morning will begin with structured check-ins (either in person or online), followed by targeted small group or 1:1 learning blocks. Staff will meet regularly to share insights, review progress, and adapt plans to maintain high engagement and attendance.

Leadership will provide ongoing coaching, supervision, and professional development, ensuring staff remain confident, connected, and well supported in their roles.

This distributed and collaborative model ensures strong academic oversight, daily consistency, and a learning culture that values student voice, autonomy, and progress.

### Community

5. Present data on the local student population and present a forecast of the student population and demand you expect to see for the proposed charter school | kura hourua.



### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

The Autism New Zealand Education Hub (ANZEH) will provide specialized education for autistic and neurodivergent students aged 13 to 18+ (Years 9 to 13). This programme specifically targets students who have difficulties engaging with traditional schooling due to anxiety, school refusal, or sensory, social, and academic challenges.

Launching in Auckland and Wellington in Term 2, 2026, ANZEH anticipates enrolling over 90 students initially, with plans to expand to over 120 students by its second year. These enrolment projections are based on the anticipated growth of necessary staff skills rather than solely on potential demand.

While a national dataset with precise figures is not readily available to the public, existing evidence strongly indicates that chronic absenteeism and school refusal are disproportionately high among neurodivergent students, especially in secondary school. This issue is a recognized concern within the education sector, as highlighted in the 2023 Education Review Office (ERO) review on Alternative Education. Autism New Zealand has been actively advocating for continued efforts to better understand and address these inequalities.

This conclusion is supported by research conducted in 2022 by the University of Otago, titled "Association Between High-Need Education-Based Funding and School Suspension Rates for Autistic Students in New Zealand," which clearly demonstrates this problem.

*"High suspension rates among autistic students compared with their non-autistic peers highlight the challenges in providing inclusive education for all, regardless of disability status. This cohort study found that high-need funding is associated with reduced suspension rates among autistic students, suggesting that expanded and more targeted supports might ensure a more inclusive education."*

Furthermore, recent Education Review Office (ERO) reports indicate that Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The Correspondence School) faces significant challenges in adequately meeting the diverse needs of its students. ERO reports highlight that Te Kura's resources are stretched, and insufficient to fully support its high-needs student population. This presents a significant opportunity for ANZEH to help bridge this gap for the neurodivergent community. We envision a future with a more collaborative and mutually beneficial professional relationship with Te Kura, which will also directly influence our projected student numbers.

In addition, a recent article published in the *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health* (2025,0:1 -8), School Attendance Among Autistic Students in Aotearoa/New Zealand: A Population Cross-Sectional Study Using the Integrated Data Infrastructure, concluded:

*"What this paper adds?"*

- *This paper presents the first comprehensive analysis of school attendance rates among autistic and non-autistic students in New Zealand, using whole-of-population data.*



### Sponsor capability

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

- *It identifies a significant disparity in regular school attendance between autistic and non-autistic students in New Zealand.”*

Across the Auckland and Wellington regions:

- There are well over 130,000 students in the 13–18+ age range (Years 9–13).
- Based on conservative prevalence estimates (3% of the population), there are at least 3,900 autistic students in these regions within this age group. We also know that this number is likely to be under-estimated.
- National data suggests unequivocally that there is disproportionately high and chronic absenteeism and school refusal among neurodivergent and disabled students, particularly in secondary years.

6. Demonstrate the level of support for the proposed charter school from the community in which it is proposed to be established considering the viewpoints of those within your wider community and also those within your specific school community.
  - a. Identify the stakeholders who have been consulted and what the consultation was
  - b. Describe the community consultation activities that have occurred or are planned
  - c. Describe how this has informed your decisions about your charter school, identifying where there is risk and where there is support for your school.

Autism New Zealand deeply values the expectations of our community and is committed to transparent communication. Recognising the strong anticipation for new initiatives, we are proceeding thoughtfully with public announcements to ensure any stated possibilities are well-considered and achievable. For instance, while a charter school is a potential avenue, we want to be certain in our direction before broadly suggesting it, to avoid creating unmet expectations.

Currently, we are actively gathering comprehensive data and insights from our community regarding educational experiences and potential future solutions. This crucial work is being led by our Research and Advocacy Manager, Dr. Larah van de Meer, who is engaging directly with our advisory groups to collect this information. These groups include the Autistic Advisory Group (comprised of autistic adults) and the Community Advisory Group (representing parents, caregivers, family, whānau, and professionals supporting autistic individuals). Importantly, these groups also ensure representation from diverse intersectional communities, including Māori, Pasifika, and individuals with high or complex needs and/or co-occurring conditions (such as those with high communication needs, non-speaking or unreliably speaking individuals, and AAC users; and those with learning and intellectual disabilities); and LGBTIQ+ people.



### **Sponsor capability**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate the capability of the sponsor to support the operations and outcomes of the charter school.

Initial meetings are underway to gather diverse viewpoints, concerns, and suggestions from these advisory groups. If this phase is successful, the prospective Charter school team and the Autism New Zealand research and advocacy team (guided by Autistic Research and Advocacy Advisors) will integrate these community perspectives into the school's planning. We anticipate either a second meeting with the advisory groups or the circulation of refined plans for their review.

This approach is informed by recent research undertaken by the Autistic Research group, which highlighted a critical concern: "The lack of... true options around learning, support, housing, vocational choices mean that many autistic people are severely restricted in their rights to freedom of choice and to live meaningful lives" – a powerful statement from an autistic adult.

We acknowledge a potential concern that the concept of a separate school might not align with New Zealand's inclusive approach to education. However, we are proactively mitigating this by incorporating the need for a strong and ongoing relationship with the student's original enrolling school into our planning. This includes outlining how the hub will work collaboratively with mainstream schools and facilitate potential reintegration, including providing support to those schools to ensure genuine inclusion and participation. It is crucial to emphasise that this is envisioned as an additional educational pathway choice, recognising the indisputable need for a different approach for some learners.

Our extensive history of advocacy and support has provided us with significant qualitative and quantitative data illustrating the shortcomings of the current system, clearly informing our advocacy efforts. Reports such as "How do we get autism support right in Aotearoa New Zealand? The final report from 2023" effectively demonstrates the issues. We can also point to our ongoing research and The Education Hub's report, titled "The Illusion to Inclusion," as further evidence of the community's clear articulation of what isn't working and the urgent need for alternative approaches.

Drawing on our extensive years of advocacy and support, we are confident in the strong backing we receive from our associated family/whānau and the autistic community. Furthermore, the professional educational associations connected to our board chair provide additional testimony to the wider educational support for this concept.

### **Readiness to meet performance outcomes**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

#### **Readiness to open**

1. Tell us in a practical way the reality of a teacher and a student on the ground at the school in a day-to-day setting and how this will endure over the life of the contract.



### **Readiness to meet performance outcomes**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

#### **For a Student:**

Each day begins with a gentle, predictable routine designed to reduce anxiety and maximise readiness for learning. Whether online, or one of the face-to-face learning hubs in Auckland or Wellington, the student logs into or arrives at their learning environment knowing what to expect. They are greeted by name — by a familiar adult — and start with a brief wellbeing check-in, using visual tools or verbal conversation, depending on their communication style.

Their individual learning plan (ILP) structures the day, including core curriculum learning, personalised interests, and explicit teaching in social, emotional, or life skills as needed. Tasks are paced to suit the student's sensory and cognitive profile — incorporating movement breaks, quiet time, or use of assistive technology. When working online, the student is supported at home by a supervising adult and has access to real-time help from their teacher or Learning Facilitator. Regular face-to-face or small-group sessions offer opportunities for connection, confidence-building, and collaborative projects.

The student is never an afterthought in a one-size-fits-all model. They are understood, respected, and supported — not just academically, but holistically — to thrive on their own terms.

#### **For a Teacher:**

Teachers are the heart of the school. A teacher's day is grounded in collaboration, responsiveness, and flexibility. Working within a multi-engagement model, the teacher begins the day checking on their students across modalities: ensuring those online are logged in and feeling ready, greeting students in-person at the hub, and liaising with home supervisors where needed.

The teacher leads small group instruction, 1:1 learning sessions, and provides differentiated content tailored to neurodivergent learners. They use a combination of digital tools, project-based learning, and strengths-based inquiry to keep learning meaningful and manageable. Their planning is guided by each student's ILP, which is co-developed with the student, family/whānau, and specialist staff.

Professional collaboration is embedded in the teacher's week: working with therapists, cultural navigators, other educators, and the wider support team. Staff training is ongoing, not a one-off, ensuring teachers are always growing in their understanding of autism, inclusive practices, and digital engagement. There is strong pastoral support for staff to reduce burnout and foster sustainable, connected teaching.

#### **Enduring over Time:**

This day-to-day rhythm is not just a launch-year vision, it's the sustainable core of our practice. The model's flexibility allows for adaptation over time while staying rooted in the principles of autism-informed, relationship-based, and individualised education. With built-in systems for professional development, stakeholder input, robust data monitoring, and curriculum review, the school will evolve and improve, while staying true to its foundation: every student known, every teacher supported, and every learning pathway purposeful.



### Readiness to meet performance outcomes

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

2. Demonstrate your readiness to open for Term One 2026 (or the term that you have specified for opening) by showing across the following establishment areas, what you will have in place for students to be welcomed for learning in Term One 2026:
  - Staffing, including your payroll solution
  - Curriculum
  - Roll
  - Health and Safety

Our intention is for a student start in Term 2, 2026, to allow for the specialised training required for staff to deliver on the vision and mission of the Autism New Zealand Education Hub. This school model is innovative and represents a new direction for supporting students with autism and other neurodivergent needs in New Zealand. As such, we are placing a strong emphasis on readiness through professional learning and development, ensuring that our team is well prepared to provide responsive, respectful, and effective teaching and support from day one.

#### Timeline and Roles:

- A Principal Leader will be recruited and in place as soon as we can begin to plan our set up, enabling their full engagement in policy development, curriculum planning, and team recruitment.
- A senior leadership team will be appointed by the end of 2025, comprising curriculum, wellbeing, and specialist leads.
- Further teaching and support staff will be recruited in December 2025, ensuring they are fully onboard for training and induction in Term 1, 2026.
- All staff will undertake a comprehensive training programme in Term 1, 2026, covering autism-informed practice, trauma-informed approaches, neurodivergent learning strategies, Te Ao Māori and culturally sustaining practice, digital learning systems, and school-specific procedures.

**Payroll:** Autism New Zealand's existing Finance and Business Team will implement a fit-for-purpose payroll solution, leveraging current systems and relationships with external payroll providers. This will be scaled appropriately to manage the employment and payroll requirements for all school staff. The team will also manage recruitment, employment contracts, performance management infrastructure, and HR systems in collaboration with the governance and leadership team of the school.



#### Readiness to meet performance outcomes

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

#### Curriculum

The curriculum at ANZEH will be grounded in the New Zealand Curriculum, with adaptation and personalisation at its core. The curriculum will be:

- Autism-informed, drawing from international best practice in inclusive education and universal design for learning (UDL).
- Individualised and flexible, reflecting students' strengths, needs, interests, and aspirations. ILP template and integrated technologies set up.
- Holistic and integrated, aligning with Te Whare Tapa Whā and supporting emotional, social, cognitive, and cultural wellbeing.
- NCEA courses and structure developed and setup with focus on Literacy and Numeracy and connections with Te Kura established for possible dual tuition students

By Term 1, 2026:

- A full curriculum framework will have been developed, including planning templates, timetabling structures, and assessment approaches.
- The engagement model will be clearly documented, outlining how face-to-face, online cohort, home-schooling support, and community clustering will function for different student needs.
- Digital platforms will be selected and trialled for delivery of online learning components, communication with family/whānau, and student progress tracking.
- Te Ao Māori perspectives will be embedded across all learning areas, including the use of Te Reo Māori, tikanga, and connections with iwi and local cultural narratives.

#### Roll

The initial planned roll will be approximately 90 students across Auckland and Wellington locations. This roll will be composed of:

- Students aged 13–18+, primarily those who are currently disengaged from mainstream schooling or at risk of exclusion.



#### Readiness to meet performance outcomes

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

- A mix of students engaging through face-to-face teaching, home-schooling support, online cohort models, and clustering for in-person contact (especially for older students).

By Term 1, 2026:

- Enrolment processes will be in place, including outreach to referrers, schools, family/whānau, and community organisations.
- A student placement and needs assessment system will be operational to support effective class and programme design.
- An initial cohort of enrolled students will be confirmed by March 2026 to enable transition planning prior to the Term 2 start.

#### Health and Safety

A comprehensive Health and Safety plan will be developed under the oversight of Autism New Zealand, ensuring compliance with the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015, the Education and Training Act 2020, and other relevant legislation.

By Term 1, 2026:

- The Health and Safety policy suite will be finalised and ratified by the governance board, including detailed procedures for emergency management, incident reporting, staff responsibilities, and hazard management.
- All school sites and digital platforms will undergo Health and Safety assessments and compliance checks.
- A system for Individual Health and Safety Plans (IHS Plans) will be prepared to support students with specific risks (e.g. epilepsy, allergies, behavioural distress online behaviours).
- All staff will be trained in safety protocols, including, first aid, de-escalation, positive handling, mental health first aid, and trauma-informed practice.
- Digital safety will be a core part of training and systems design, including online learning platforms and student safeguarding.

In addition, Autism New Zealand's existing infrastructure, which already supports service delivery to vulnerable clients, will provide experienced guidance and practical resources to support a safe and responsive school environment.



**Readiness to meet performance outcomes**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

**Performance**

7. What is your strategy to raise academic achievement and uplift student attendance? How will this benefit the students at the proposed charter school | kura hourua? How will you measure this?

ANZEH will raise academic achievement and attendance by delivering individualised, autism-informed learning pathways grounded in predictability, co-regulation, and relationship-based practice. Our flexible delivery models (face-to-face, online, home-based) allow students to re-engage safely and progressively, building confidence and ownership of learning.

We will:

- Develop Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) with clear academic and engagement goals
- Use strengths-based approaches to tailor curriculum delivery to student interests and capabilities
- Embed daily check-ins, visual timetables, and sensory-friendly routines to reduce anxiety and build consistency
- Foster strong relationships with family/whānau to support learning beyond the classroom

Benefits include increased confidence, a sense of belonging, reduced behavioural challenges, and greater academic engagement.

**Measurement:**

- Literacy, numeracy, and curriculum progress via diagnostic tools and ILP benchmarks and curriculum-based measurement (CBD). Obviously, some students will require a range of different assessment tools depending on their needs. A comprehensive list of available tools can be supplied if needed. All assessment practices will be delivered with an informed consent process via a students' ILP.
- Weekly attendance tracking and engagement monitoring
- Termly student voice, family/whānau feedback, and wellbeing checks

8. How will you ensure the standard of tuition will enable you to meet your contracted outcomes in the Performance Management Framework?

High-quality, autism-informed teaching is core to ANZEH's model. We will ensure this through:



**Readiness to meet performance outcomes**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

- Specialist recruitment: Staff will be selected for their experience with neurodivergent learners and commitment to inclusive, flexible practice and openness to learning and developing.
- Ongoing professional learning: Focused on neurodivergent affirming practices, trauma-informed practice, universal design for learning (UDL), Te Ao Māori perspectives, and restorative approaches
- Instructional coaching and regular classroom observation to support reflective teaching and pedagogical growth
- A strong academic leadership team, including a Curriculum and Learning Lead, to oversee delivery and ensure curriculum alignment, assessment, and moderation processes meet national requirements
- A strong organisational culture building on the excitement and realisation of providing something unique and purposeful in the lives of these students.
- The strong sense of “he waka eke noa” embracing the key values of Manaakitanga, Whanaungatanga, Kotahitanga and Rangatiratanga.

9. What strategies will you apply to enable and support monitoring against each performance measure in the Performance Management Framework?

We will develop a robust internal monitoring system aligned to the Performance Management Framework. This includes:

- Digital dashboards integrated with our Student Management System (SMS) to track attendance, progress, engagement, and wellbeing in real time. We also intend to use a similar ILP type system for teacher performance that can be shared with students (He waka eke noa). Students will be part of this feedback process.
- Regular data reviews by the Senior Leadership Team and Board to ensure accountability and timely interventions if needed
- A cycle of quarterly reporting and continuous improvement, including student voice, staff input, and family/whānau engagement
- A designated Performance and Data and Insights role within Autism New Zealand’s national team to support data analysis, reporting accuracy, and performance insights



**Readiness to meet performance outcomes**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

10. Describe how will you manage the early identification of issues and risks and what preventative measures will you take to address them.

We will implement a proactive, wraparound model that identifies and addresses risks early. This includes:

- Regular multidisciplinary meetings to review student needs, staff wellbeing, and operational risks
- An early alert system in our SMS to flag drops in attendance, disengagement, or wellbeing concerns
- Strong relationships with family/whānau and external professionals to co-design interventions early
- Risk registers reviewed monthly by leadership and termly by the Board
- Staff trained to recognise early signs of student distress or learning stagnation and respond with tiered support plans

Preventative strategies include flexible scheduling, ongoing training, peer supervision, and family/whānau involvement in problem-solving.

11. Outline strategies for addressing academic underperformance.

Success is a completely individual measurement and even though some assessments will assess against norms we will be focused on the progress of the individual against the individual. Any academic or other underperformance will be addressed through individualised interventions focused on restoring engagement and adapting support. Strategies include:

- Reviewing and adapting ILPs with student and family/whānau input
- Providing targeted small-group or 1:1 tuition for key learning areas
- Accessing specialists as needed to support within core teaching teams
- Leveraging student interests (e.g. technology, arts, life skills) to re-engage them in academic pathways
- Close monitoring of progress with fortnightly reviews for students identified as at-risk



### Readiness to meet performance outcomes

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

Where necessary, external support (e.g. speech-language therapists, psychologist) may be brought into further scaffold learning.

12. Describe academic achievement and attendance programmes or initiatives that will enable you to meet/exceed the performance measures.

Key initiatives include:

- Personalised Timetables – created with students to reduce overwhelm and promote ownership
- Hybrid Delivery Options – face-to-face, online, and home-based learning that maintains engagement even during illness or anxiety periods
- Learning through Interest Pathways – using project-based and passion-based learning to boost motivation and outcomes
- Daily Connect Sessions – structured relationship-building and check-ins to improve attendance and wellbeing
- Attendance Coaching – staff will work with students and family/whānau to build strategies around anxiety, transport, transitions, and readiness for school
- Tiered Engagement Plans – scaling support based on level of attendance, with built-in rewards and scaffolding

Together, these initiatives position ANZEH to not only meet but exceed contractual performance expectations, especially for students historically underserved by traditional schooling.

### Requirements for distance learning

Only complete if you are providing education through a distance learning environment.

13. Describe how you will measure and ensure distance student engagement and attendance to meet the targets in the Performance Management Framework (noting that the measures will be agreed in the contract and targets will be the same as those for face-to-face environments).

We are fully committed to ensuring that our distance learning students meet the same expectations for engagement and attendance as their face-to-face peers. This will be achieved through a multi-layered system of monitoring, personalised planning, proactive support, and accountability, underpinned by a commitment to student-centred, autism-informed practice.



### Readiness to meet performance outcomes

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

#### Attendance and Engagement Measurement:

- In addition to normal role marking requirements, daily attendance will be recorded through digital check-ins, participation in scheduled live sessions, and evidence of learning engagement (e.g., submission of tasks, discussion forum posts, or contact with a teacher).
- Students will be expected to meet agreed weekly learning hours, with flexibility for asynchronous learning, recorded lessons, and individualised learning schedules where and if appropriate.
- A student engagement dashboard will track key indicators (login frequency, learning task completion, participation in group work, teacher contacts) and generate alerts for potential disengagement.
- Family/whānau and caregiver engagement will be an essential element of our monitoring system, including weekly check-ins and shared learning plans.

#### Responsive Systems to Support Attendance:

- Each student will have a designated Learning Facilitator who monitors engagement, meets weekly with the student (virtually or in person), and liaises with the wider support team.
- Patterns of non-engagement will trigger an escalation pathway, starting with personalised outreach and support and, where needed, face-to-face re-engagement planning.
- Termly engagement reports will be reviewed by leadership to identify trends and ensure data-driven action.

This system ensures that all students — regardless of location — are supported to remain actively engaged in learning and that we meet or exceed our attendance and participation targets in the Performance Management Framework.

14. Demonstrate how you will provide pastoral care for distance students, including online safety and adequate supervision of students aged under 16 years.

Pastoral care for distance students is a cornerstone of our education model, particularly because many of our learners will have complex needs, previous trauma from disengagement, or experience high levels of anxiety. Our pastoral care framework will be built on trust, consistency, culturally sustaining practice, and proactive support — with an emphasis on relationships and holistic wellbeing.



**Readiness to meet performance outcomes:**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

**Pastoral Care Framework:**

- Each student will have a pastoral support plan, co-developed with the student, their whānau, and their key staff (e.g., teacher, Learning Facilitator, therapist if involved).
- A named Learning Facilitator will provide weekly one-to-one check-ins and will act as the student's primary connection to the school — including support for goal setting, emotional regulation, social connection, and wellbeing.
- All staff will be trained in autism-informed and trauma-informed practices, and in recognising signs of distress, dysregulation, or social isolation in online settings.

**Online Safety:**

- All students and caregivers will receive an Online Safety Orientation, covering respectful communication, digital citizenship, privacy, and strategies for navigating unsafe or inappropriate content.
- Digital platforms used by the school will have built-in moderation, audit trails, and restricted access functions to protect younger and vulnerable students.
- Staff will monitor all online interactions, including chat functions, forums, and collaborative workspaces, and will follow clear safeguarding protocols.
- A dedicated Digital Safety and Wellbeing Officer (within the support team) will oversee online conduct and provide support to students or family/whānau with concerns.

**Supervision of Students Under 16:**

- Students under the age of 16 will require a Supervising Adult Agreement, signed by their caregiver or designated adult. This outline agreed supervision during learning hours and provides guidance on supporting a home-based learning environment.
- Caregivers will be offered training and regular communication to ensure they feel equipped and supported in their role.
- Where needed, in-home visits or in-person clustering sessions may be arranged to strengthen relationships, offer respite, and provide additional wraparound support.



**Readiness to meet performance outcomes**

The requirements for this section are to demonstrate your readiness to open in 2026 and how your school will deliver outcomes against the Performance Management Framework.

As an organisation we understand that pastoral care is not an “add-on”, but a core condition for learning, especially for students who may be isolated, anxious, or navigating complex personal contexts. Our model ensures care, connection, and accountability for all learners — wherever they are.



**Comments on draft agreement**

Applicants wishing to propose any amendment to the Specific Terms of the Agreement for consideration must do so as part of this application.

N/A

Released under the Official Information Act 1982



**Application declaration**

Complete and sign the application declaration below to complete your application document.

Topic	Declaration	Applicant's declaration
<b>Application Process, Terms and Conditions:</b>	I/we have read and fully understand this Application, including the Process, Terms and Conditions. I/we confirm that the Applicant/s agree to be bound by them.	Agree
<b>Collection of further information:</b>	<p>The Applicant/s authorises the Charter School Agency and the Ministry of Education to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• collect any information about the Sponsor, except commercially sensitive pricing information, from any relevant third party, including a referee.</li> <li>• use such information in the assessment of this Application.</li> </ul> <p>The Applicant /s agrees that all such information will be confidential to the Charter School Agency and the Ministry of Education.</p>	Agree
<b>Use of Information:</b>	The Applicant/s agree that information provided as a part of the fit and proper persons test can be shared with appropriate third parties engaged to undertake the necessary reviews.	Agree
<b>Draft Agreement:</b>	The Applicant/s accepts the General Terms and Legal Schedules of the Agreement and confirms that they have prepared their application on the basis that no amendments to the General Terms and Legal Schedules will be considered.	Agree
<b>Conflict of Interest declaration:</b>	The Applicant warrants that it has no actual, potential or perceived Conflict of Interest in submitting this Application or entering into a Contract to deliver the Requirements. Where a Conflict of Interest arises during the Application process the Applicant /s will report it immediately to the Charter School Agency and the Application Point of Contact.	Agree
<b>Conflict of Interest detail:</b>	N/A	



**Application declaration**

Complete and sign the application declaration below to complete your application document.

Signature:	
Full name:	Dane Dougan
Title / position:	Chief Executive
Name of organisation:	Autism New Zealand
Date:	9 <sup>th</sup> May 2025

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# Autism New Zealand Charter School Proposal

Budget Reports  
(financial acuity attachment)

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