



17 January 2023

Dear parent/caregiver

From the Principal – Start of Year Letter 2023

I hope you have all had a great start to 2023. I am certainly looking forward to a fantastic year ahead. I would like to welcome all our new families and whānau to Otamatea High School's growing community and I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible over the coming weeks. As we approach the start of our new school year, I want to ensure that all our families are well prepared, so please take some time to read the following information.

Roll growth: Despite being on an enrolment scheme from the start of this year, which is designed to limit overcrowding at our school, our roll has ballooned to over 670 students for 2023, with new enrolments still being processed, representing a 50% increase since 2021. The Ministry of Education, who own our properties, is in the process of providing us with 6 additional (relocatable) classrooms, which will be set up on the field near the year 7 and 8 playground. Unfortunately, we are still a couple of months away from these being ready for our students. In the meantime, we will be using all suitable spaces as classrooms for the start of the year, including the library, the year 13 study room, and converting H2 into two separate classrooms.

Uniform: It is important that all students start the school year in the correct uniform. Please visit our school website <https://www.otamatea.school.nz> for our detailed uniform regulations. A few areas to be mindful of:

- Socks and shoes: These must be black, and black only. Socks with stripes or with advertising logos, or shoes with white soles, or coloured laces etc are not allowed. It is a very simple rule; "black and black only".
- PE uniform: These must be worn by all students in years 7 – 10. This includes the iwi coloured regulation T-shirt (Whātua – red, Ngāpuhi – yellow, Maniapoto – blue, Arawa – green) and plain black shorts. In term 1 when students will be swimming, they must wear comfortable pool safe togs and rash shirts (no cotton to be worn in the pool).
- Parents and caregivers will be contacted if students are not in the correct uniform. If your child is unable to wear the correct uniform on any given day, then they must bring a note explaining the circumstances, and go to our uniform exchange prior to 8.50am (located at the front of the school hall next to the main entrance) where they will be loaned the correct uniform item for the day.
- Under no circumstances should non regulation caps, jackets, pullovers etc be worn to school. If so, these items may be confiscated. This will be strictly monitored. This includes when students are walking to and from school, and when travelling on the school buses.

Vaping: A reminder that it is illegal to vape (or smoke) at school or on the school buses. We will be taking a very strict approach to students who breach this law. The Smokefree Environment and Regulated Products

(Vaping) Amendments Act 2020 prohibits vaping in schools across New Zealand and we can be fined up to \$4,000 for not complying with this Act. It is also illegal to sell or give a vaping product to someone under 18.

Cell Phones: This year we have a schoolwide cellphone ban for all students in years 7 to 10. Cellphones must not be brought to school, nor can they be used on the school buses. There are no exceptions to this, and parents/caregivers will be contacted if students are caught bringing these to school. Senior students in years 11 to 13 are welcome to use cellphones so long as they are not seen or used during timetabled classes (including during whānau time and lunch classes).

Chromebooks: A reminder that all year 10 to 13 students will need to bring a Chromebook in a hard shell case to school each day from the start of the school year. If you haven't done so already, please contact our ICT team at ict@otamatea.school.nz urgently if your child is not able to start the new year with their own device.

Attendance and Truancy: A new attendance/truancy service is being created in the Kaipara this year. One of their tasks will be following up with families of children with unexplained and/or unjustified absences. Over the past couple of years, we have seen our average attendance rate drop from nearly 90% to just over 80%. This is a national trend largely due to the effects of COVID, but also due to the increase in winter bugs last year. Nevertheless, we still have families keeping their children away from school for reasons that are not justified. Attending school on a regular basis is hugely important. Every day counts towards a child's learning and pays huge dividends for their future. There is a very strong correlation between attendance and educational achievement, so please aim for a minimum 90% attendance rate for your child over the course of the year.

Bullying Prevention Programme: This year we will be rolling out a bullying prevention programme for all year 7 and 8 students. The KiVa programme, developed in Finland, is a successful, evidence-based programme that will provide us with a wide range of concrete tools and materials for schools to educate our students on the problem of bullying. From March this year, following staff training, all year 7 and 8 students will have a fortnightly lesson on bullying, with one of the key areas focussing on the role of bystanders of bullying incidents, and their significance. I am confident that this will raise awareness of this problem, empower our students, and reinforce our collaborative and supportive school culture.

Literacy Support: You will no doubt have read media reports of the national decline in New Zealand's literacy rates over the past decades. We see evidence of this at school with many students no longer reading for pleasure, and this is reflected in their poor literacy achievement. At present, the literacy standard required to pass NCEA is not set at a very high level, meaning that when students get to year 11, most can still pass, even if their literacy level levels are poor. NCEA is currently being reviewed and strengthened, and from next year, new compulsory literacy (and numeracy) standards will be introduced nationally. These standards are being set at a more realistic (and challenging) level. Pilot results for these showed that nearly two thirds of students failed the literacy standard. We have increasing numbers of students arriving at Otamatea High School well below the expected levels in reading and writing and they are in grave danger of not being able to meet this new literacy standard when they get to year 11. This will see them potentially leaving school without an NCEA qualification. This year we are investing in additional literacy support classes for all year 7, 8 and 9 students to help accelerate their progress. These will be small, timetabled classes that will replace some of these students' rotation and option subjects. I strongly encourage all students to be regularly reading for pleasure so please support us, and your child, with this by encouraging them to read every day.



Whānau structure and deans: All students have a whānau teacher that they see at the beginning of each day. Each student also has an iwi dean. Your child's whānau teacher and iwi dean are here to oversee and support your child's wellbeing. If you have any concerns about your child, or there is something going on at home that we need to know about, please contact your child's whānau teacher or iwi dean. We also have a dedicated and experienced team of guidance counsellors available here at school. For subject specific queries please contact your child's subject teacher. All staff information and contact details can be found on our school website.

Otamatea High School Website

We work hard to keep our website up to date. Please visit us at <https://www.otamatea.school.nz> for information on

- Start of year dates
- School costs and Stationery lists
- Bus routes
- Bell times and term dates
- Uniform regulations
- Staff contact details
- Other important information, news, and notices.

Our school office reopens on Monday 23rd of January 2023.

Important Start of Year Dates

Wednesday 1st February 9.00am – 3.30pm (No buses running)
ALL year 13 students and prefects to attend Leadership Day (this includes new Year 13 students)

Thursday 2nd February 8.50am – 3.30pm (Buses will be running)
All new students (this includes ALL NEW Year 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) and **ALL Year 13 students and prefects**
Free Subway lunch will be provided

Friday 3rd February 8.50am – 3.30pm (Buses will be running)
ALL Year 9 students ONLY (New and current year 9 students - no other years to attend)
Year 11 and 12 student online meetings for course confirmation
Free Subway lunch will be provided

Tuesday 7th February 8.50am – 3.30pm (Buses will be running)
Whole school to attend – normal timetabled classes

Yours sincerely,

Dirk Smyth
Principal
Otamatea High School

Kia mataara ki te ao - Ready for the World