



ASPIRATION AND CREATIVITY

Takapuna Grammar School • Auckland, New Zealand

New Zealand was recently ranked “the best country in the world at preparing students for the future” in a study by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The nation is known for having a generously funded state school system and a student-focused curriculum that encourages opportunity.

The advantages of this are clear at Takapuna Grammar School on the North Shore of Auckland, which has fostered a culture of aspiration and creativity since it was founded 90 years ago. Aware that geographically isolated New Zealand has little choice but to be globally competitive, the school cultivates an outward-looking attitude in its students, many of whom have gone on to make their mark on the world. “Our alumni include Olympians, politicians and the Grammy-winning artist Lorde,” says Principal Mary Nixon. “There is a high expectation that all of our students will achieve their potential.”

MEASURING SUCCESS

Takapuna has a reputation for outstanding academic achievement, but always maintains that grades are only one measure of success. “We work carefully at defining what excellence looks like,” says Nixon. “We personalise learning as much as possible. As a result we have a busy, broad curriculum with lots on offer, from tourism and media studies to traditional subjects like chemistry and geography. We want all our students to find an interest that they can say is ‘me.’”

Pupils are encouraged to set up their own networks and pursue their own passions. “We offer more than 100 clubs, from Mandarin to anime to TED Talk clubs to Amnesty International to LGBT groups. Anything the students want to start, they can, with the help of the teachers. It’s empowering and engaging for them.”

Mixed-age form classes encourage friendships across school years. “The forms meet every day,” says Nixon. “They discuss things like, ‘What do you do

to be organised?’ and ‘How do you keep yourself emotionally balanced?’ It’s very effective having older students work with younger ones. And it brings opportunities for leadership from different types of intelligences, not just from ‘natural’ leaders.”

LIFE EXPERIENCE

Sport and the arts are a key part of the curriculum at Takapuna and learning is experiential whenever possible: students participate in field trips, go to the theatre and spend lots of time at the beach. Unsurprisingly, the school attracts plenty of international students, drawn both to the curriculum and to northern New Zealand’s subtropical climate. “We have around 200 fee-paying international students, from 40 countries, who live in local home stays,” says Nixon. “They come from all over the world to get qualifications in a country that’s highly regarded for education – and to have a great life experience.”

This international mix, with students from Europe, South America and all over Asia, contributes to the school’s outward-looking perspective. “The students are aware we have a global world right on our doorstep,” says Nixon. “The world is shifting and it’s really important to understand what living locally and globally looks like. It’s no surprise many of our students have gone out into the world and been noticeable.”

The main point of difference at Takapuna is that there is no “right” way to be noticeable. “We’re focused on growing great people who are willing to contribute to making life better,” says Nixon. “But all of our students know it’s okay to ‘be you’ at Takapuna Grammar School. You don’t have to be top dog. You can just be yourself. Together we can make a difference.”

www.takapuna.school.nz