

# Term 1, Week 3

Kia ora koutou,

It has been a fantastic start to the school year here at Grantlea Downs. Despite the rather erratic weather we've been experiencing lately, the atmosphere in the classrooms and playground has been bright and positive. It is wonderful to see our students settling in so well and reconnecting with friends and staff.

### Building Belonging & Engagement

A huge highlight for us this term was our very first Mihi Whakatau (welcome assembly) last Friday. This special ceremony was led by our student House Leaders, who did an outstanding job welcoming our new students and whānau into the Grantlea Downs family.

Following the formal welcome, our new students—assisted by their Year 8 buddies—planted a native tree in our native bush area, before their families joined us for morning tea in the staff room. It was truly heartwarming to watch our Year 8s take such care in guiding their younger buddies. We are already seeing these connections continue in the playground, with the older students looking out for our newest additions.

This initiative is directly linked to one of the three overarching goals in our new Strategic Plan:

1. Belonging and Engagement (Te Noho Toitū me te Piri ki te Kaupapa)
2. Learning that Matters (He Akoranga Whai Take)
3. Thriving Learners (He Ākongā Āta Tupu)

Research clearly shows that communities thrive when everyone feels comfortable working and learning together. When students and families feel a strong sense of belonging, engagement in learning naturally follows. The Mihi Whakatau and our Buddy System are just two of the ways we are bringing this goal to life, and we have committed to holding a Mihi Whakatau every term to ensure all new families receive this warm welcome.





## Celebrating 20 Years as an Enviroschool

Speaking of planting, this year marks our 20th Anniversary as an Enviroschool! To celebrate this milestone, we are planning for every existing student to plant a native tree in our area at some point this year. It is a lovely way for our current students to leave a living legacy at the school.

**School Picnic** – We tried, but the weather was not kind! It has been cancelled tonight due to wet, soggy fields! Because building community connections is so vital to our goal of 'Belonging and Engagement,' we love our school events. They are the perfect time to meet new faces, reconnect with other families, and chat with our staff in a relaxed setting.

**We look forward to seeing you at future events!**

**Thank you** to NZCT. A massive thank you to the New Zealand Community Trust (NZCT) for their generous contribution, which allowed us to upgrade our pool heat pump in 2025. This upgrade means we can keep the water temperature consistent and enjoy using the pool for longer periods throughout the year—something our students will definitely appreciate!

## Communication & Support

Throughout the year, I will be using this newsletter to showcase more initiatives and practices we are implementing to reach our full potential across our three strategic goals.

Finally, thank you for your ongoing support and kindness as we kick off the year. We value the partnership we have with you. Please remember that our doors are always open for communication. However, if you have a matter that requires time and attention, it is best to make an appointment with us. We want to ensure we can give your concerns the uninterrupted time and thought they deserve, rather than rushing a conversation during the busy morning drop-off.

Have a lovely rest of your week.

Ngā mihi nui,

Beth Wills

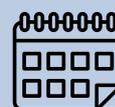
Principal

### Home and School

A big thank you to the community members who attended the Home and School meeting last night. We have some exciting fundraising initiatives coming up which we will share with you very soon. Our main focus for this year is raising funds for the new Junior Playground!



### Important Dates



~~\*Tonight 5pm School Picnic cancelled~~

\*23 Feb to 6<sup>th</sup> March - Kereta & Acacia Swimming at CBay

\*24<sup>th</sup> Feb - Board Meeting

\*26<sup>th</sup> Feb - School Triathlon

\*2<sup>nd</sup> March - Sea Week

\*10<sup>th</sup> March - Rippa Rugby Y5 & 6

\*12<sup>th</sup> March - Rippa Rugby Y7 & 8

\*16<sup>th</sup> March - Teacher Only Day



**GRANTLEA  
DOWNS**

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# Student Achievement: TJ Awarded George Hill Memorial Scholarship



## Scholarship Winner

In January, during the school holidays, I attended the RNZPBA Summer School for 2026. We spent five days boarding at St Andrew's College in Christchurch with experienced drumming and piping tutors from all over the world.

This year, the RNZPBA was lucky enough to secure Stewart Liddell (Scotland) and Steven McWhirter (Ireland) to help tutor 233 students, including 33 from Australia. Every day from 7am to 5pm was jam-packed with mass bands, group lessons, private individual lessons, workshops, tune writing, and fun night activities.

My favourite part of the five days was my private lesson with Steven McWhirter. It was a great opportunity where I was able to learn a new tune and gain new skills.

On the last day of Summer School, we held a concert to showcase what we had learnt to our parents, followed by a prizegiving where 21 prizes were awarded. I was lucky enough to be awarded the George Hill Memorial Scholarship, which is open to any drummer under the age of 18. This scholarship means that all my tuition is paid for the RNZPBA 2027 Summer School.

TJ

