



24 November 2025

Hon Erica Stanford

Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
Wellington, 6160

Dear Minister Stanford,

On behalf of the Aquinas College Board, we wish to express our deep concern and opposition to the proposed legislative amendment removing the requirement for school boards to give effect to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* within the Education and Training Act.

For Aquinas College, *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* is not a symbolic or procedural commitment. It is a living covenant that calls us into right relationship with one another – a moral partnership grounded in justice, dignity, and respect for the mana of all peoples. In our Catholic context, this understanding is inseparable from our Gospel call to love our neighbour and to build communities founded on peace and equity.

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops have affirmed that *Te Tiriti* “provides the moral basis for the presence of all other peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand.” In this light, the proposed removal of *Te Tiriti* obligations diminishes not only the partnership between tangata whenua and the Crown, but also the shared moral responsibility of schools to advance equity, inclusion, and cultural identity as fundamental dimensions of education.

Despite the passage of this Bill through Parliament, we align with the New Zealand Catholic Education Office in affirming that Catholic schools must continue to give effect to *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* as an essential component of our special character responsibilities. A strong focus on the principles of Catholic social teaching – including human dignity, subsidiarity, the preferential option for the poor, and the common good – guides our approach to embedding *Te Tiriti* in Catholic education. Upholding these principles enables ākonga and their whānau to flourish and reach their full human potential.

As a Catholic college, we view partnership with tangata whenua as part of our mission to make Christ present in our community – fostering relationships built on respect, compassion, and mutual service. Inspired by Pope Francis’ teaching that Indigenous peoples are “principal dialogue partners” (*Laudato Si’* #146), we continue to honour *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* through authentic relationships with iwi and hapū, the inclusion of te reo Māori, tikanga, and mātauranga Māori within our curriculum, and our ongoing commitment to equity for ākonga Māori.

The removal of *Te Tiriti* provisions risks reversing decades of progress toward a more just and inclusive education system. We therefore urge the Government to reconsider this amendment and to engage in genuine partnership and consultation with Māori, the education sector, and the faith community.

At Aquinas College, our Board's conviction is clear: honouring *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* is not a matter of compliance but of conscience – a reflection of who we are as a Catholic school in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Yours in Christ



Ruth Dunne
Presiding Member



Matt Dalton
Principal