



Tōtara Team (Year 3 - 6) Newsletter Term 1, 2026

Naāu mai, haere mai, welcome to the Tōtara Team for 2026

Welcome to our newly formed Tōtara Team. This team comprises students in Years 3 - 6. For ease of communication, the Year 3 - 4 students will be known as Tōtara Iti (small) and our Year 5 - 6 students will be known as Tōtara Nui (big).

It is great to be back at school for 2026. Our tamariki (children) have settled smoothly into their new classes and routines. For returning Year 4, 5, and 6 ākonga (students), it is lovely to have them back at school. We have been impressed by how quickly and seamlessly our Year 3 students have transitioned to Rose Street from Weld Street.

A very special welcome to our new tamariki and whānau; in Room 5: Ben and Shiva (Year 3), in Room 8: Oscar (Year 5), in Room 10: Saskia and Robin (Year 5).

Introducing the Tōtara Team

The Tōtara Team consists of Tōtara Iti located in Rooms 5 and 6, and Tōtara Nui located in Rooms 8 and 10. We have combined the former Rātā and Rimu Teams together to create a wider middle school. Our aim is to see more connection and tuakana-teina between the ākonga. Giving both tamariki and staff the opportunity to come together and learn, develop, and progress.

On Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, Year 3 and 5 and Year 4 and 6 will join together to complete either an art or a P.E. lesson. As the year progresses, there will be more opportunities for our tamariki to come together and share their learning.

Katy Synge - Room 5 (Year 3 and 4), Tōtara Co-Team Leader katy@wadestown.school



Kia ora,

I have taught in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. This is my fourth year at Wadestown School, and I am teaching Year 3 - 4 in Room 5. I am also one of the Tōtara Co-Team Leaders this year, along with Clare Gilligan. I look forward to getting to know the children better in this role. Teaching is my passion, and I especially love watching the 'lightbulb moment' children have when everything clicks into place, and they realise they can do it! I am passionate about Literacy learning and teaching and have held numerous different roles in this area.

Outside of school, I enjoy spending time with my friends and whānau. I especially enjoy spending time outdoors on a warm, sunny Wellington day.

Clare Gilligan - Room 8 (Year 5 and 6), Tōtara Co-Team Leader, SENCo (Years 5 - 8)

clare@wadestown.school.nz



Kia ora whānau,

It's a pleasure to be teaching in Room 8 again this year. For those who may not know me, I'm Clare Gilligan, and this is my fourth year at Wadestown School, working within the Year 5 - 6 team. In 2026, we will all be spending time across the middle school, so I'm looking forward to building connections with our Year 3 and 4 ākonga as well as continuing to work closely with our Year 5 and 6 learners.

I grew up in London and spent lots of time in Ireland, where my whānau is from. Over the recent summer break, I travelled back to Europe to spend time with friends and family, and was lucky enough to visit Norway and see the Northern Lights - an unforgettable experience!

As we begin the year, my focus is on creating a settled, positive classroom where ākonga feel known, supported, and ready to give things a go. Strong relationships and clear communication between school and home make a big difference, so I always value hearing from whānau. Please feel free to pop in, email, or introduce yourself if we haven't met yet. I'm looking forward to partnering with you and celebrating your tamariki as they grow in confidence, independence, and learning across the year.

Anna Wilson - Room 6 (Year 3 and 4) anna@wadestown.school.nz



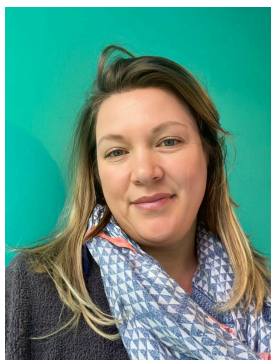
Kia ora!

My name is Anna Wilson, and I am thrilled to be returning to teach in years 3 and 4 for 2026. I have many years of teaching experience in both Wellington and the UK, most recently at Queen Margaret College.

I live in Northland with my husband and two children, aged 10 and 15. Our spare time is spent supporting their many sporting interests and hobbies. I love the outdoors and nature, and enjoy walking the tracks of Te Ahumairangi or Zealandia Te Māra a Tāne. I like to read, bake, and spend time with whānau and friends.

In the classroom, I enjoy teaching through a structured approach and challenge ākonga to achieve their best. I particularly enjoy teaching literacy, and have a passion for encouraging children's creativity and imagination through art.

Liberty Cook - Room 10 (Year 5 and 6) liberty@wadestown.school.nz



Tēnā koutou,

My name is Liberty Cook, and I'm pleased to be teaching in Rūma 10 again this year. This is my third year full-time at Wadestown School, though I've been part of the school community since 2022 as a relieving and part-time kaiako. Before coming to education, I worked as a lawyer, but retrained when my own children started primary school. My passions outside of learning and education include singing, gardening, art, design, and travel. In 2023, my family and I had the incredible experience of living in the South of France. I grew up on the Kāpiti Coast, but my whakapapa connects me to Te Rarawa and Te Aupōuri in the Far North. These days, I live in Karori with my husband and our two boys, aged 11 and 13. I am looking forward to getting to know you and your child as the year unfolds.

Ann Marshal - Room 6 (Year 3 and 4) and Classroom Release Teacher (Year 1 - 4)
ann@wadestown.school.nz



This year, I am lucky enough to be based with the Tōtara iti and Pōhutakwa team. I will be working at Rose Street on Tuesday as a classroom release teacher for Years 3 - 4 and every Friday, I will be teaching in Room 6. I'm looking forward to working with children I have taught in previous years. I will be releasing teachers for their Classroom Release Time (CRT).

Amy Yuschik - Classroom Release Teacher (Year 5 and 6)
amyy@wadestown.school.nz



Hi everyone, I'm Mrs. Yuschik, an American-trained teacher who moved to New Zealand with my family. I have two primary-aged children of my own and am enjoying being back in the classroom with some of your children. Outside the classroom, I love to read, hike, camp, and travel. My family and I also love dogs and often have a furry foster friend in our house. I look forward to getting to know your children and learning and exploring alongside them!

Wadestown School Values

Our Wadestown School GROW are:

- **G**ratITUDE (Whakawhetai),
- **R**esilience (Manawaroa),
- **O**thers (Whānaungatanga)
- **W**onder (Miharo)

Our GROW values are integrated throughout our classroom programmes and are also celebrated and discussed at our whole-school Hui-a-Kuras (School Assemblies). Ākonga will seek to deepen their understanding of how to demonstrate these values further in their daily classroom life.

Our Literacy Programme

Reading: Pānui



Ākonga (students) are encouraged to read for pleasure and enjoyment both at school and at home. Each class has weekly scheduled Library visits where they can issue books. Students can also listen to audiobooks as an alternative to reading books independently.

Tōtara Iti (Year 3 - 4)

Our reading programme is based on the components of “reading to”, “reading with”, and “reading by”. Reading mileage has a huge impact on a child's reading progress. Every ākonga reads daily at school, and we encourage them to do the same at home. Our Wadestown School ‘Book Bingo’ is a great motivator for ākonga to read widely at home and to use the Library to assist with this. Students *learn to read*, and then *they read to learn*. Our focus this term will be on explicitly teaching prediction and visualisation strategies, using prior knowledge to support them.

Tōtara Nui (Year 5 - 6)

Reading will begin with a shared class novel, ‘The Explorer’. As ākonga listen to the kaiako (teacher) read aloud, they will develop key reading skills, including summarising, making inferences, predicting, and clarifying vocabulary. They will then apply these skills through independent tasks. Strong links between reading and writing will be emphasised, whilst continuing to analyse texts from both the author’s and the audience’s perspectives.

Handwriting: Tuhi-ā-ringa

Research has shown that the greatest impact on ākonga writing is handwriting, and ensuring that they can form letters correctly and automatically. This reduces cognitive load when writing and has a greater impact on learning and memory.



Classes will have handwriting lessons four times a week.

Tōtara Iti: Will focus on ākonga’s learning of cursive writing. Cursive handwriting increases the speed of writing. This term, we will revise correct letter formation, as it is a prerequisite for learning to add ligatures

Tōtara Nui: Will revisit ‘the basics’ in handwriting to ensure that each tamariki has the correct letter formation, and joining strokes (ligatures) before moving on to cursive writing.

*Reference: *Handwriting Better Than Typing for Learning and Memory:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l69-wKYn>



Writing: Tuhituhi

Using a Structured Literacy approach to writing, ākonga will first focus on sentence-level writing. They will learn to construct engaging, high-quality sentences using a range of sentence types, beginnings, vocabulary, and correct punctuation. Writing will be based on personal

interests, inquiry topics, and different writing genres. Ākonga will then apply this knowledge to longer pieces of writing

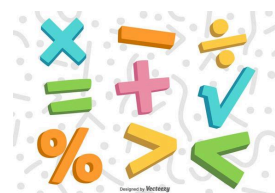
The teaching of 'The Code', a systematic approach to teaching spelling, will continue this year. Ākonga have been grouped by need, and will be explicitly taught spelling sounds and rules.

Oral Language

We are starting the term with a focus on 'Personal Journeys'. Tōtara iti will create and share Taonga (Treasure) Troves, which will be a valuable opportunity for ākonga to connect with classmates while building the ability to speak clearly and confidently in front of a group. Tōtara nui will participate in drama games based on their class novel to encourage them to perform in small groups in front of the class.

Numeracy: Pāngarau

Following the Structured Numeracy approach, ākonga will be grouped by year level for their Mathematics lessons. We will use the *Maths No Problem* resources, which align with the curriculum's scope and sequence. Students will explore each topic and apply their knowledge in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts to deepen their understanding. Once they have demonstrated mastery, they will move on to problem-solving activities to further enhance their skills.



In addition, there will be an ongoing emphasis on basic facts to help develop rapid recall.

Tōtara Iti:

Place Value:

Year 3: Recognising the place value of each digit in a three-digit number.

Year 4: Counting forwards and backwards in 2s, 3s, 4s, 5s, 6s, 7s, 8s, 9s, 25s and 50s from multiples of the counting unit.

Addition and subtraction:

Year 3: Adding and subtracting numbers up to 1000 (e.g. $329 + 3$, and $329 - 200$)

Year 4: Adding and subtracting up to four-digit numbers

Tōtara Nui:

Year 5: Rounding whole numbers to the nearest hundred thousand, ten thousand, thousand, hundred, or ten.

Year 6: Counting forwards and backwards with positive whole numbers, including working with negative numbers (e.g., starting at -6 and counting backwards in 2s).

Addition and Subtraction:

Year 5: Adding and subtracting with renaming

Year 6: Adding and subtracting within 1,000,000

Inquiry: Social Sciences and Health

Our school-wide inquiry for 2026 is based around the theme, 'Journeys'. It will serve as the basis for cross-curricular units throughout the year. This term, we are looking at 'Personal Journeys: identity, wellbeing and goal setting. Ākonga will focus on personal growth and development, the evolution of living things, and how people make decisions and meet their needs and wants.

Physical Education and Fitness: Hakinakina

Daily fitness provides valuable brain breaks and helps to increase the children's fitness levels.

On Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, Years 3 and 5 and Years 4 and 6 will join together for Tōtara Sport. This term, we are beginning with cooperative games to help develop collaborative skills. Later in the term, we will focus on Largeball skills such as catching, throwing, and dribbling, before moving into playing Largeball games of netball and soccer.

The Arts: Toi



Visual Art: On Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, Years 3 and 5 and Years 4 and 6 will have the opportunity to use a range of mediums to express their creativity. Visual Art will have a skills component to the lessons.

Performing Arts: In Term 1, we will begin with weekly Tōtara singing sessions on Monday afternoons.

Te Reo: Matua Alwyn will continue weekly Te Reo lessons. Tamariki will learn to share their mihi and pepeha, deepen their understanding of how these foster connections within Māori culture, and explore their own family history.



Kapa Haka: Hemi Prime, our Kapa Haka tutor, will once again be teaching all tamariki on Thursday mornings. Our performance group will also resume this year, and Tōtara Nui ākonga are welcome and encouraged to participate.

We look forward to continuing to work with both Mātua Hemi and Mātua Alwyn again this year.

Digital Technology:

Gmail accounts: All ākonga have an email address that is linked to their class kaiako. These accounts are intended solely for school purposes and are monitored regularly. We discourage the use of these accounts outside school hours, especially without parental supervision.

Tōtara Nui: Ākonga will begin the year using Google Classroom. Year 6 are familiar with this platform. They will work alongside the Year 5s to familiarise them with Google Classroom features, first for in-class use and then for homework.

Homework

The purpose of homework is to reinforce your child's learning at school and help them to develop time management of homework tasks. Homework will consist of kaiako-set Mathematics tasks and 10-15 minutes on a book bingo task. Basic facts and spelling will be

covered in class. Book Bingo awards are available for tamariki to earn, with valuable House points for each challenge they complete. The homework is designed to be flexible, allowing each ākonga to manage and organise their time around after-school commitments.

Student Behaviour and Wellbeing:

In the Tōtara Team, we aim to foster an environment where mistakes are viewed as a natural part of the learning process and tamariki take the lead in solving problems and taking responsibility. We will support ākonga in this learning, and they should initially come to kaiako (teachers) for advice. Dealing with issues promptly helps ensure a resolution for all parties. However, if your child comes home and informs you of an issue, please do let us know as soon as possible so we can solve it.

Communication with Kaiako (Teachers):

Email is best for contacting your child's kaiako with a short message or to request a meeting. Teachers endeavour to answer emails within 24 hours. Urgent messages, such as changes to after-school pickup plans, should always be sent to the office. Teachers are often unable to check their emails during the school day.

Reminders

- Tamariki **should not be at school before 8:30 am** unless they are on Road Patrol.
- Students are encouraged to arrive between 8.30 am and 8:45 am. This gives them time to prepare for the start of the day by unpacking what they need from their school bag and ensuring they are ready for the 8.55 am bell.
- **Absences:** If your child will be absent from school, please call the school office at (ph: 472 4779) and leave a message on the answerphone **before 9:00 am**. If we do not hear from you, the office will phone you to follow up.
- **Cell phones** are the tamariki's responsibility and must remain in their school bag throughout the day unless a kaiako has given specific permission. The school is not responsible for lost or damaged cell phones.
- **Sun hats:** Named sun hats are compulsory in Term 1 for all outdoor activities.
- **Uniform:** Please ensure all uniform items are named, including drink bottles, to make them easier to locate if misplaced.
- Ākonga bringing **scooters** to school must remember their helmets and their *Wadestown School Scooter licence*. New licences can be obtained through the office.
- Year 6 tamariki doing **Road Patrol** are expected to arrive at school at 8:15 am to set up for their duty. If they are unable to attend their duty, please inform the school in advance so we can arrange a replacement.

Tōtara's Term 1 Calendar 2026

- 17 February:** 'Meet the Team' Evening 6.00-6.45 pm, School Hall
19 February: Mihi Whakataū, School Hall, 9:15 am
24+ 26 February: Kaiako Whanau Meetings for Tōtara Team
2 April: End of Term 1

Tōtara Team Activity Donation Breakdown 2026	
Amount added to Student Statement for Terms 1 - 4 = \$110.00	
Term 1: Trip to Te Papa	\$13.50
Classroom Activity Donation Total Spent (Term 1)	\$13.50
Activity Donation Total Remaining	\$96.50

We look forward to a great year ahead and meeting you all soon.
Noho ora mai,

Clare Gilligan, Katy Synge, Anna Wilson, Liberty Cook, Ann Marshall and Amy Yuschik.
The Tōtara Team

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