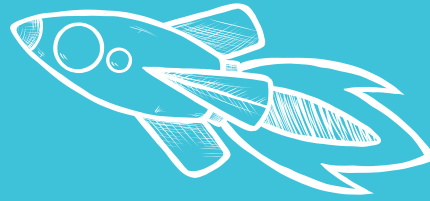




WHERE SCIENCE
TECHNOLOGY
ENGINEERING AND
MATHS COME ALIVE.



2026

Rocket Challenge Impact Report

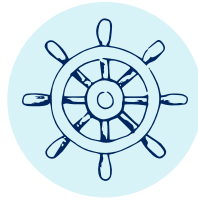


**Engineering
New Zealand**
Te Ao Rangahau

HOUSTON, we have lift off!



Ākonga blast off into STEM by designing, building and launching a water rocket. Through six hands-on modules, they learn about Newton's laws, apply the engineering design process, and work together as a rōpū.



Module 1: Mission Command

Ākonga meet Mission Command (their kaiako and ambassador), unpack their rocket kit, and form their superstar space crew before exploring the first stage of the engineering design process – ask.



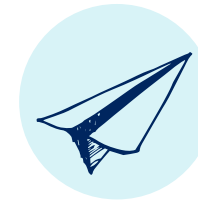
Module 2: Fly

Ākonga learn what it takes to launch a rocket, become health and safety experts, and perform their first test flight.



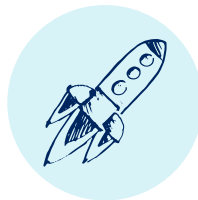
Module 3: Force

Ākonga are introduced to Sir Isaac Newton and explore his first law of motion, learn the second step in the engineering design process and design their rocket.



Module 4: Aerodynamics

Ākonga learn Newton's second law and aerodynamics and how this applies to rockets. They then continue the engineering design process by creating and testing a rocket prototype.



Module 5: Thrust

Ākonga learn Newton's third and final law of motion and what this has to do with thrust. They then put their prototypes to the test in their second test launch.



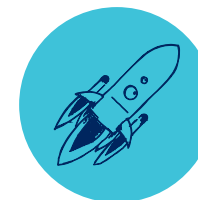
Module 6: Blast off!

Ākonga make final improvements to their rockets before celebrating their achievements by sending their rocket on its final flight.



The engineering design process

Across the challenge, ākonga ask questions, imagine solutions, create prototypes and test improvements – building confidence through practical iteration.



The final challenge

The programme culminates in their final blast off using their ultimate rocket design, while applying teamwork, problem-solving and resilience.

OUT OF THIS WORLD STEM learning

In 2026, the Rocket Challenge helped nearly 14,000 rangatahi blast off into STEM through engaging, hands-on learning. Reaching approximately 11% of all ākonga in the target year levels, the challenge is helping make engineering more visible, relevant and achievable for young Kiwis across the motu.

★ Reaching more schools and ākonga

This year, 481 classes from 345 schools took part – representing 19% of the target school market.

Participation grew from 411 classes in 2025, an increase of 17%. The number of kaiako remaining on our waitlist also fell from 203 in 2025 to just 27 applicants this year – mostly from homeschools outside our core audience. This improvement was supported by increased funding for Rocket Challenge kits and the introduction of the Ice Cream Challenge, which gave Year 5–6 kaiako another programme option helping distribute demand.

The Wonder Project supplied 319 funded rocket kits and 18 refresh packs to schools, together valued at \$93,000.

★ Extending access for priority hāpori

We continue to prioritise access to hāpori that face barriers to participating in STEM education and careers. Among funded classes:

- 36% of ākonga were Māori
- 12% were Pacific Peoples
- 33% were in schools facing high socio-economic barriers

58 Māori-medium classes participated, representing 13% of all classes. The challenge also achieved a broad geographic reach with 29% of participating schools located in rural areas, while 57% were located outside the main centres of Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

★ Building confidence and interest among ākonga

The strongest impact was seen in how ākonga felt about STEM after taking part:

- 80% said the Rocket Challenge made them feel more confident in STEM subjects
- 53% became more interested in STEM-related jobs, while a further 21% were already interested
- 94% of kaiako observed a positive shift in ākonga perceptions of STEM
- 85% of ākonga said they would take part in another Wonder Project challenge

★ Equipping kaiako to teach STEM

The challenge also built capability in schools by giving kaiako the resources, structure and support to teach STEM with confidence:

- 95% of kaiako increased their confidence in teaching STEM
- 94% enjoyed teaching the Rocket Challenge
- 94% said their ākonga were engaged
- 99% said they would take part again

★ Connecting classrooms with industry

Industry ambassadors help ākonga connect classroom learning with real people, workplaces and careers. Of the 226 ambassadors available this year, 193 were matched to support 198 classes. More than half of the kaiako who requested an ambassador received this additional support, and 97% of ambassadors enjoyed the experience.

PARTICIPANTS

This year

13,949

ākonga

Since 2018

138,214

481

classes

4,766

345

schools

1,557

193

STEM
professionals

2,606

DEMOGRAPHICS

70% moderate to high barrier schools

48% Māori or Pacific Peoples

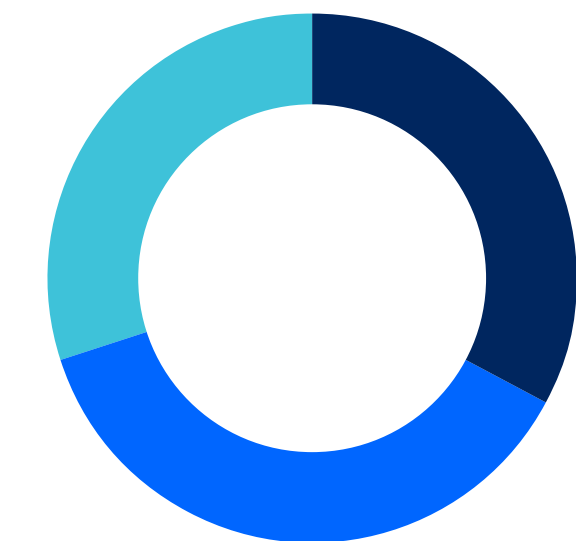
58 Māori-medium classes

57% of schools in the regions

29% rural schools

★ Socio-economic barriers

33% of participating schools who received a funded kit had high socio-economic barriers, with 70% being moderate to high – maintaining our goal of 25% having high barriers. Amongst all participants, we still had 30% in the high barrier group.



■ High barriers, 33%
■ Moderate barriers, 37%
■ Low barriers, 30%

★ Ākonga ethnicity

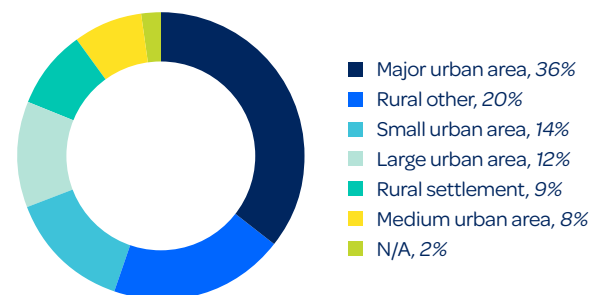
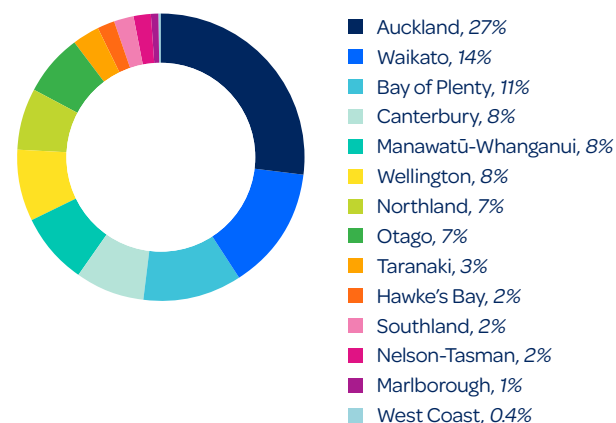
We had 36% ākonga Māori and 12% Pacific Peoples participating in the Rocket Challenge. With resources available in te reo Māori, we also had 58 Māori-medium classes across 52 schools.



■ Māori, 36%
■ Pacific Peoples, 12%
■ Other, 52%

★ Region

We had 43% of participating schools in the main centres (Auckland, Wellington and Canterbury), and 57% across the regions. Rural schools made up 29% of participants.



■ Major urban area, 36%
■ Rural other, 20%
■ Small urban area, 14%
■ Large urban area, 12%
■ Rural settlement, 9%
■ Medium urban area, 8%
■ N/A, 2%

ĀKONGA experience



"I thought that it was really fun and easy to get engaged in because you don't need to be the BEST at maths, science, tech, or anything if you want to do the project."

Merryn, Ākonga – Merrin School Ngā Whetū Kohara

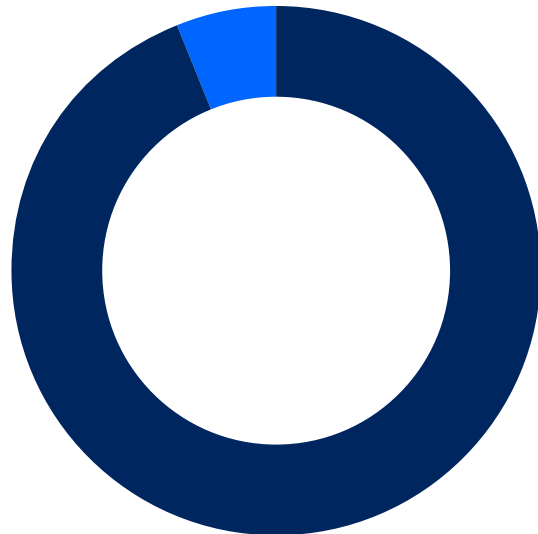
PERCEPTIONS

94% saw a positive shift in perceptions
of kaiako

74% are interested in a STEM career
of ākonga

★ STEM perceptions

When kaiako were asked if they noticed a shift in ākonga perceptions towards STEM over the challenge, 94% said they noticed a positive shift.



- Their perceptions changed positively, 94%
- Their perceptions didn't change, 6%
- Their perceptions changed negatively, 0%

★ Interest in STEM jobs

After the challenge, 83% of kaiako believed their ākonga were more curious about the opportunities that different careers in STEM can provide.

More than half of ākonga reported becoming more interested in STEM jobs. With a further 21% already interested, 74% were positively oriented towards a STEM career after the challenge.



- I was more interested, 53%
- I was already interested, 21%
- I was less interested, 13%
- I am still not interested, 13%

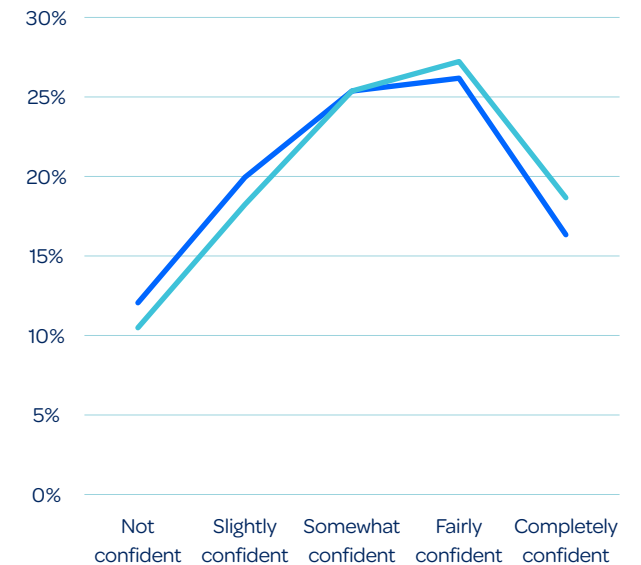
CONFIDENCE

80% increased their STEM confidence
of ākonga

★ STEM subject confidence

When asked if taking part in the challenge made them feel more confident in STEM subjects, 80% reported that it did.

When asked about confidence across each subject, we saw on average a 7% increase in ākonga being fairly or completely confident. Science had the biggest shift, with a 17% increase in confidence.



- Pre
- Post

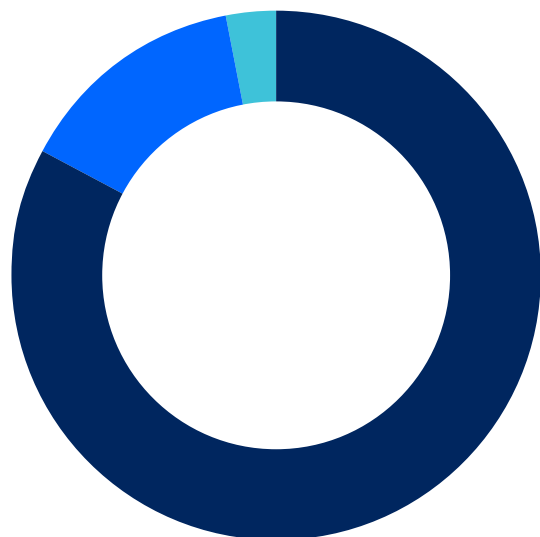
KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

77% *in ākonga knowledge on forces increase*

92% *of ākonga practised the four key STEM skills*

★ Level of challenge

Most kaiako said ākonga were challenged by the learning material at about the right level.



■ About the right level of challenge, 83%
 ■ A bit too challenging, 14%
 ■ It was too easy, 3%

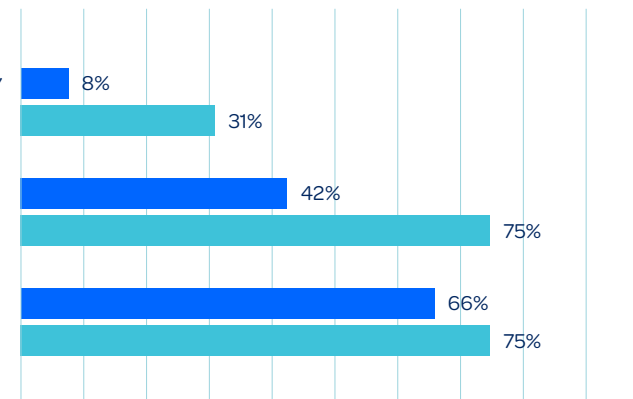
★ Learning outcomes

We saw a positive shift in what ākonga knew about the key learning outcomes, including a 73% increase in ākonga saying they knew quite a bit or everything on Newton's laws of motion.

Know 'quite a bit' or 'everything' on Newton's laws of motion

Correctly identified thrust as a force of flight

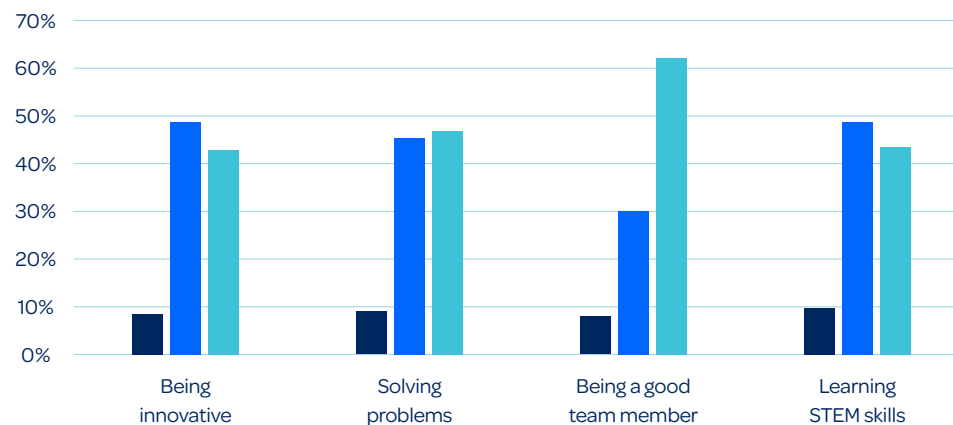
Understood testing and iteration improves design



■ Pre
 ■ Post

★ STEM skills practiced

During the challenge, we expect ākonga will learn about and practice four key STEM skills. 92% of ākonga had practiced these skills either a little or a lot during the challenge. Teamwork was a stand-out, with 63% of ākonga saying they practiced this skill a lot. 94% of kaiako also said there were lots of opportunities for ākonga to discover and develop STEM skills.



■ Not at all ■ Just a little ■ A lot

ENJOYMENT

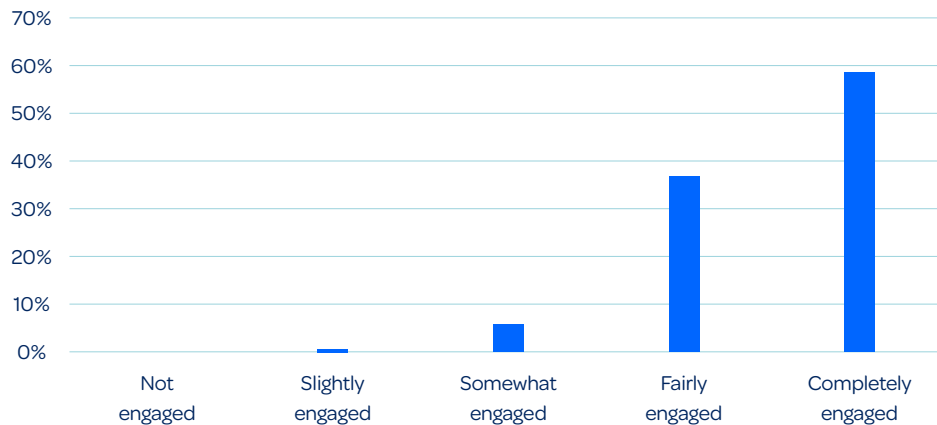
94%
of kaiako
said ākonga
were engaged

79%
of ākonga
had a great
experience

85%
of ākonga
would take
part again

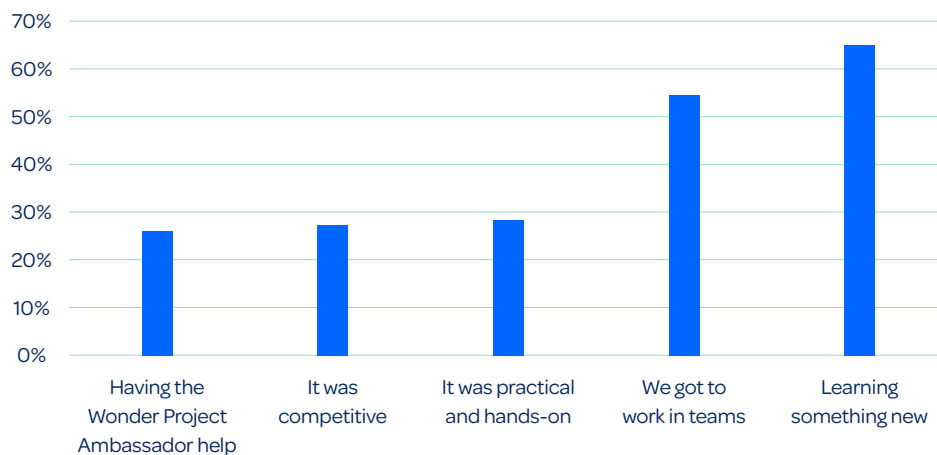
Engagement with learning

94% of kaiako reported their ākonga were fairly or completely engaged with the learning journey.



What they liked

From their Wonder Project experience, ākonga mostly valued learning something new and working in teams, when asked what they enjoyed about the challenge.



Experience completing the challenge

79% of ākonga had a great experience doing the Rocket Challenge.

Take part again

85% of ākonga said they would like to take part in another Wonder Project challenge as part of their school work.

“One of the most fun things I have done in 6 years at a school – please come again so that the year 5s can experience this greatness.”

Charlotte, Ākonga – St John’s School

KAIAKO experience



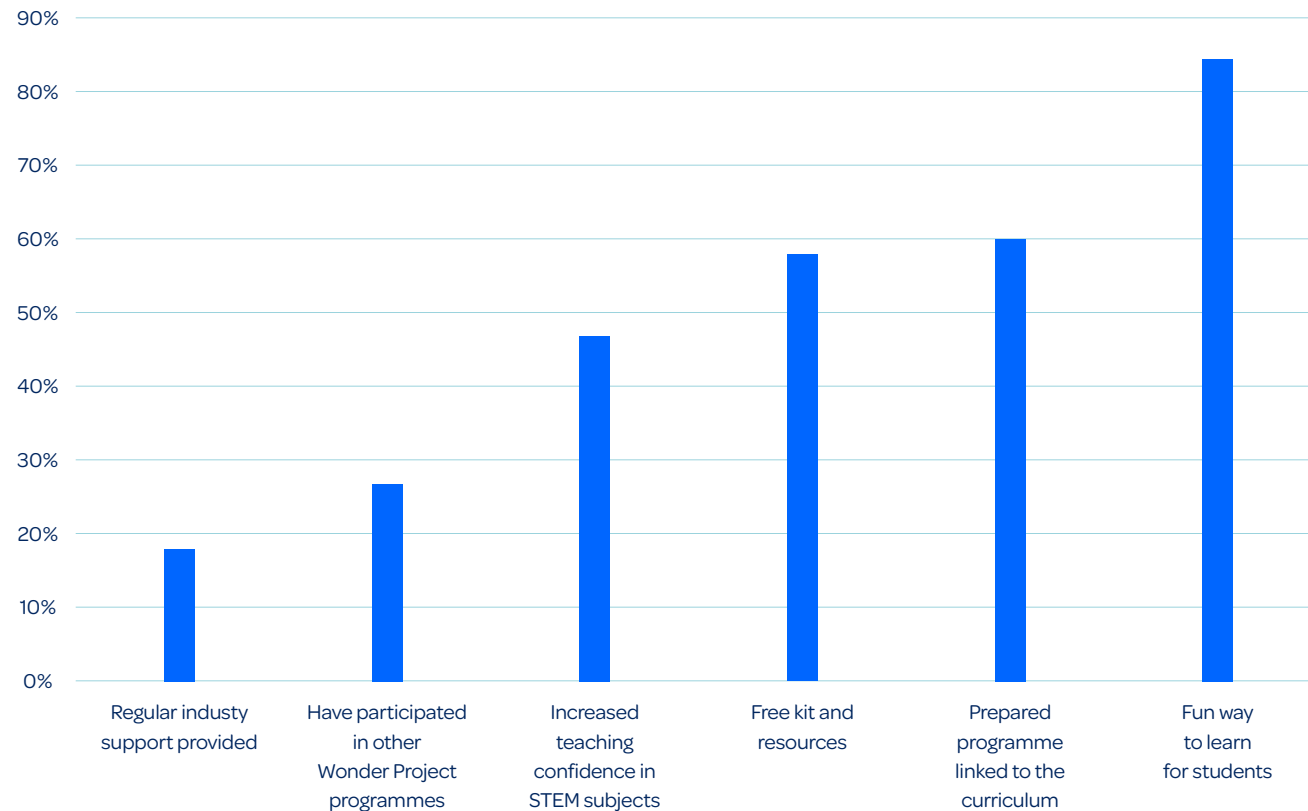
"The programme meets learners where they are, allowing every child to participate, contribute, develop problem-solving skills, and succeed at their own level. It's an inspiring experience that leaves students excited about engineering and their own potential."

Maria, Kaiako – Three Kings School

REGISTERING

★ Motivation to sign up

Teachers primarily registered for the Rocket Challenge because it looked like a fun way for their ākonga to learn. Having a prepared programme linked to the curriculum, the free kit and resources, and increasing their confidence teaching STEM were also predominant reasons they signed up.

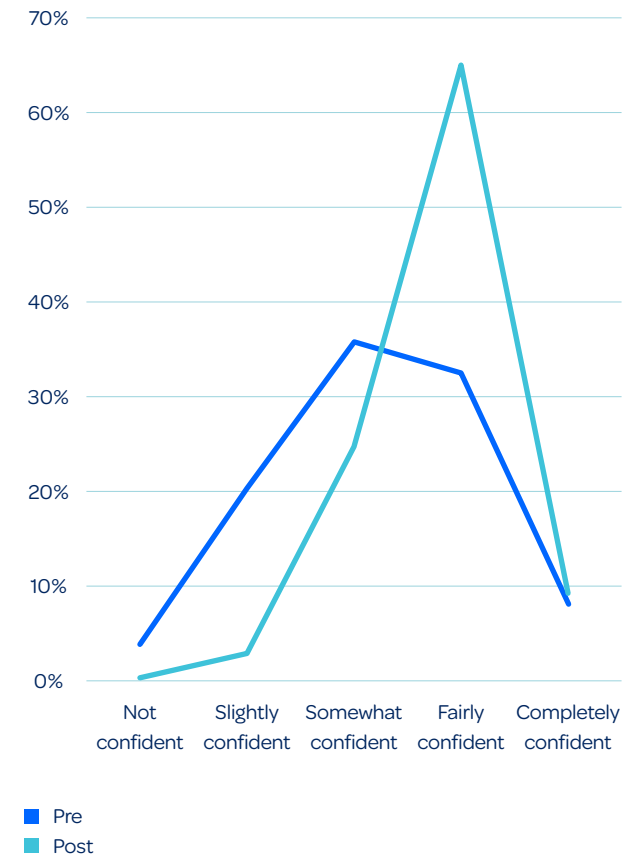


CONFIDENCE

95% increased their STEM confidence
of kaiako

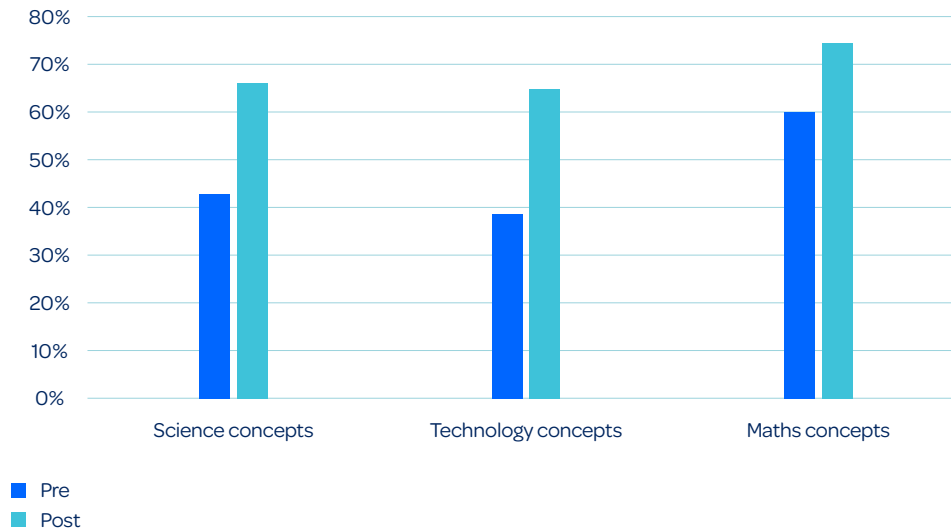
★ Teaching STEM subjects

When asked if they felt participating in the challenge has increased their confidence in teaching STEM, 95% of teachers agreed. We had an 83% increase in kaiako feeling fairly or completely confident teaching STEM subjects.



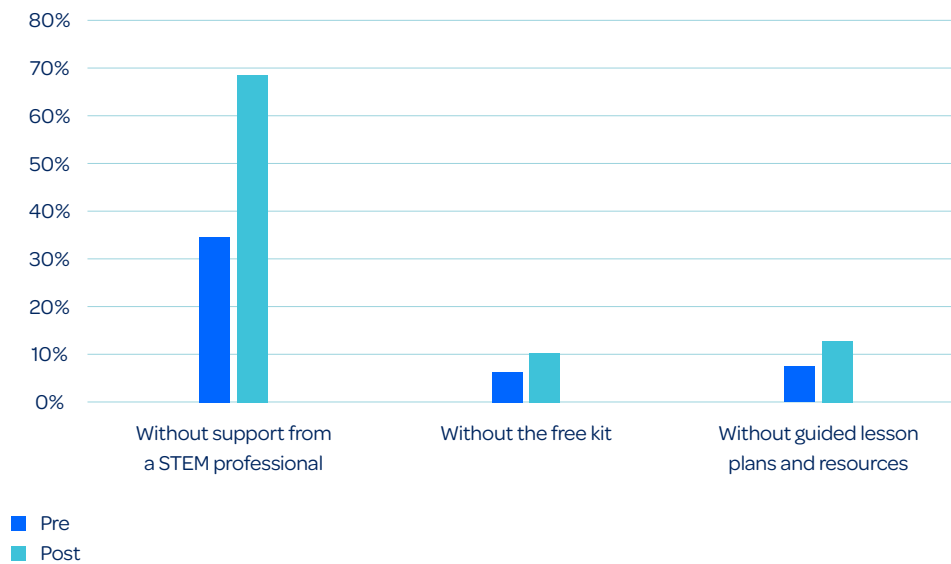
Demonstrating STEM concepts

There was a 44% increase in kaiako feeling fairly or completely confident demonstrating STEM concepts overall.



Wonder Project support

When asked how confident kaiako would feel running the challenge on their own and without various aspects of support provided by the Wonder Project, we notice that kaiako still value the free kit and lesson plans post the challenge. They do feel more able to run the challenge without support from a STEM professional, which aligns to their increase in confidence teaching STEM subjects and demonstrating concepts.



“It was inspiring to watch the students build their confidence, collaborate effectively, and develop a genuine passion for engineering.”

Eman, Kaiako – Thorndon Primary

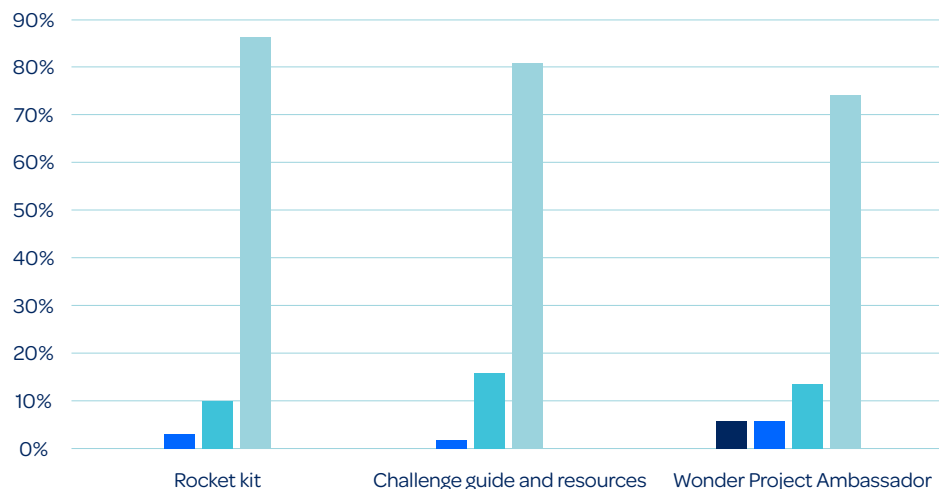
CHALLENGE CONTENT

92% of kaiako said the challenge was inclusive

Resources

Almost all respondents found the rocket kit and challenge resources helpful. 88% found their ambassador helpful, with 90% also agreeing their ambassador was effective and their involvement and real-world experience made a big difference.

■ Not helpful
■ Somewhat helpful
■ Helpful
■ Very helpful



92% of kaiako said the online Learning Hub was helpful, easy to use and navigate – the highest rating we’ve had in five years, after testing different layouts. The teaching assets supplied saw 93% of kaiako being fairly or completely satisfied, with 93% also saying the same about the ākonga module content. 86% of kaiako that used the assessment resources provided were also satisfied with those.

Accessibility and inclusiveness

Challenge was appropriate for neurodiverse learners

80%

Challenge was well structured and paced to support ākonga learning and agency

90%

Challenge was appropriate for ākonga from different cultures and backgrounds

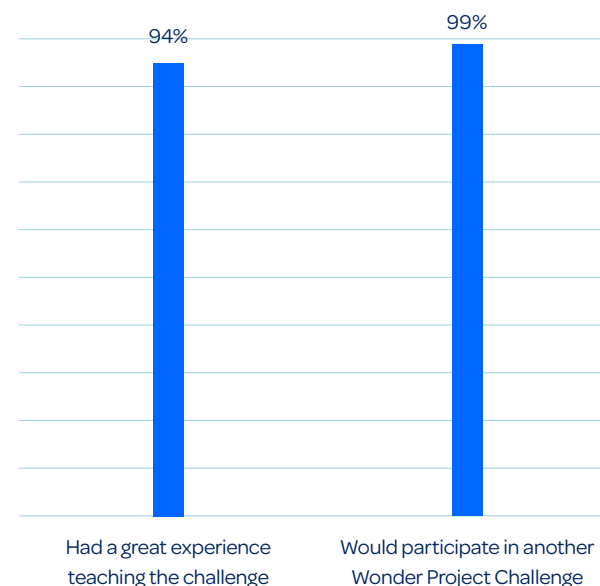
92%

ENJOYMENT

75 Net Promoter Score

Kaiako Net Promoter Score (NPS)

The kaiako NPS rose to 75 from 55 in 2025, with 79% being promoters for the Wonder Project. 99% said they would take part in another Wonder Project challenge, and 94% said they had a great experience teaching the Rocket Challenge.



AMBASSADOR experience



***"It was nice to see fun and joy
around something that is
often seen as complicated
and technical."***

Semisi, Ambassador – Fonterra



CHALLENGE CONTENT

★ Resources

Ambassador respondents were mostly satisfied with the challenge content, including training provided, the teaching materials and ākonga modules. These were the highest satisfactions levels we've had in the last five years, showing efforts to make resources clearer and easier to access have been welcomed.

Satisfied with the teaching content

93%

Satisfied with the ambassador training

95%

Satisfied with the ākonga module content

97%

"The classroom videos and teacher support were great, so I just needed to turn up and be present."

Billy, Ambassador – Tonkin + Taylor

ENJOYMENT

75 Net
Promoter
Score

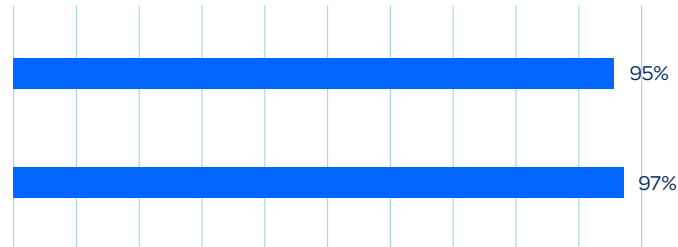
92% said they
would do
it again
of ambassadors

Ambassador Net Promoter Score (NPS)

The ambassador NPS rose to 75 from 53 in 2025, with 75% being promoters for the Wonder Project. 95% said they would take part in another Wonder Project challenge, and 97% said they had a great experience supporting the Rocket Challenge.

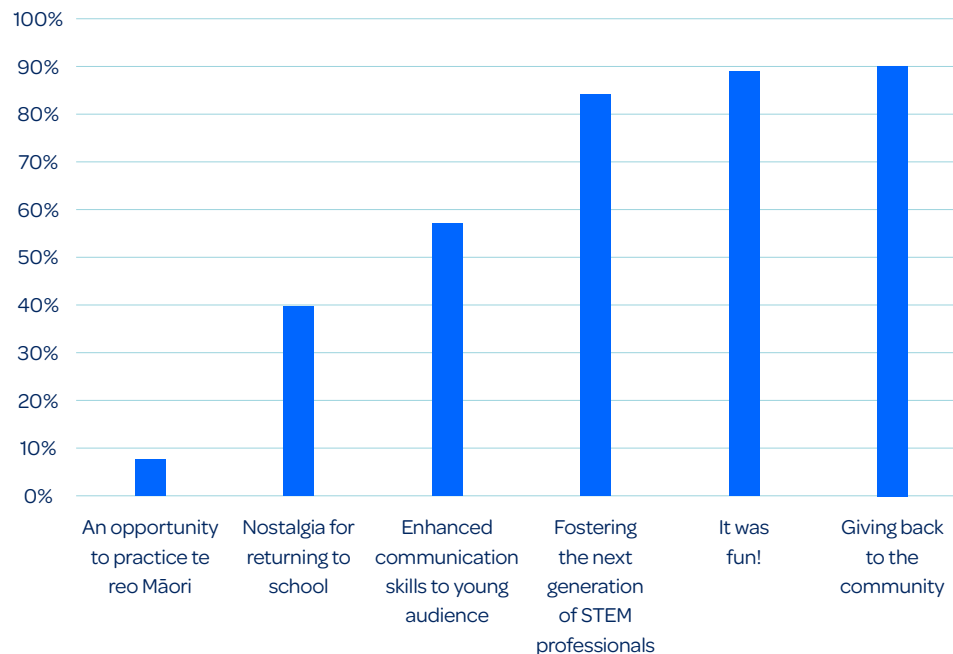
Would participate in another Wonder Project challenge

Had a great experience supporting the Rocket Challenge



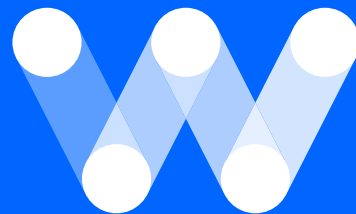
Benefits

Ambassadors rated giving back to their community, having fun, and fostering the next generation of STEM professionals as the top things they gained from being part of the Wonder Project.



“If rockets were powered by enthusiasm, our class’s rockets would have left the stratosphere.”

Silvia, Ambassador – Jacobs



Wonder
Project

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