

LOWER HUTT SCHOOLS LEADING THE WAY WITH INNOVATIVE CROSS COUNTRY EVENTS!

Tara Fevre - HCC

"In its traditional form, the cross country event doesn't engage all tamariki, they don't enjoy it and it's failing to get many of them excited about physical activity."



in fact, "one in four children aged 6-13 don't like cross country, and by the time tamariki are 13 years old, only 52% of them actually enjoy participating in it."

That's according to research conducted by Sport New Zealand. It's statistics like this that are encouraging schools to reflect on the purpose of their cross country events. This story looks at the positive changes five local kura have made to their traditional cross country events. This is in line with a recently released position statement from [Physical Education New Zealand](#) challenging schools to question if their events are fit for purpose. ***Goodbye continuous laps around the school field and hello to fun, innovative and inclusive approaches to the way we engage tamariki in the 'traditional cross country run!***

Whilst recognising that competition is important, and that competitive races meets the needs of some students, there is a universal recognition across the schools featured that this shouldn't dominate or determine the way the 'whole school' cross country event is delivered.

All five examples are a result of schools questioning their why and moving to focus on delivering events that allow tamariki to develop a broad range of skills - allowing them to have fun and feel successful in the process.

GRACEFIELD SCHOOLS' fun run event radiated FUN!

Utilising the existing infrastructure onsite, a fun run course marked out with balloons took students around the field, through a dug out water pit, through powder colour stations and up and over the playground. Teacher Kristian Day commented how minimal set up was required noting ***"all you need to make things fun is a bit of colour, water and a sound system."*** A mass group warm up to the 'chicken dance' and 'crazy frog' took place before the students were let loose on the course.

In recognising that the top runners needed to be identified for the upcoming zone events, Gracefield ran their competitive event earlier in the day. The school were pleased to see 90% of students opt into this event. "Its about balance" Principal Kelly Barker noted. When challenged on their motivation for doing things differently Kelly said ***"it's about being inclusive and having fun, this event meets the needs of everyone."***



Gracefields' new approach was given the seal of approval by the children too. A year 4 boy commented the event was **"really fun and colourful."** When asked about the two different events being run, a year 5 girl commented "it's nice to have the option." When asked how the 'competitive' and 'fun' courses compare, two students agreed "they are the same, but this one is funner" [speaking about the fun run event].

HUTT CENTRAL SCHOOL ran to a similar model with the competitive 'opt in' cross country races taking place first, before students descended on a fun run course. Students were able to opt into one, or both events. To simplify the setup, the fun run course ran on the inside of the competitive course. A variety of challenges were built into the fun run with the course weaving through the school sandpit, up and down classroom stairs, through a maze made of pigtails and rope, under a cargo net, through a mud pit, over some hurdles and down a slip n slide! It's fair to say the children were smiling from ear to ear and did not want to stop. The line for the slip n slide was evidence of quality of the fun run experience with many students commenting **"I want to do it again!"**

Deputy Principal Stephanie Campbell when speaking to the school before event said "it's the first time we haven't used Sladden Park in years, and **it's about time we made some changes.**" (Sladden Park is the location for the Zone Cross Country qualification event and is where HCS had hosted their cross country in previous years.)



Teacher Deb Wilson was excited about the changes the school had made, commenting that "running is not for every child." Speaking to the style of event the school had opted for, Deb said **"it's about creating an environment where the pressure comes off and giving kids freedom of choice."**

For the fun run, students participated in 'whanau groups' of mixed year level and gender. The start of the fun run was "staggered so the children didn't feel like they were being measured."

The changes made were well received by the school community with parents & whanau lining the course cheering on the runners.

BOULCOTT SCHOOL'S Craig O'Connell described their innovative cross country event as "one of the greatest days he'd seen during his education career!" Similar to the above two schools, the day was divided into two parts, the competitive races (for Years 3-6) in the morning and the FUN RUN (for everyone) in the afternoon. A team of keen staff and parents set up the course for the competitive races, and then made some adjustments for the fun run.

A similar theme across all schools highlighted here was the way options were provided to cater for all children. Boulcott's competitive races were optional, with their fast, strong runners being able to really express themselves and strive for a Top 10 placing if they so wished.



The fun run was compulsory, with the 'challenge by choice' mantra followed - students could miss out an obstacle if they chose. The fun run consisted of a slip and slide, noodle alley, water guns, balance beams, cargo nets and bubble machines, with a colour disco to finish! No placings were given and students ran with their buddy class (seniors with juniors etc.).

Again, school infrastructure and existing resources were utilised for the fun run event with equipment coming from the school PE Shed, caretaker's shed or being borrowed from local families.

To make it extra worthwhile, the event doubled as a fundraiser for the school with whanau sponsoring children to run and the Home and School team selling sausages for lunch.



**"I loved the FUN RUN and I hope we can do it again next year."
Oliver - Year 4**

When asked about their motivation for change Craig noted **"as a school, we are always looking at ways to improve our learning and experiences for our students."** Continuing, Craig noted, "the traditional way of holding the cross country event just doesn't really work for all students, so the inclusion of the fun run component has meant that all students can experience some degree of success on the day." Stu Devenport, Boulcott School Principal agreed, commenting that making change was a big deal. **"Our goal was to increase participation and most importantly, make it more enjoyable for everyone involved.** We also wanted to ensure there was still an opportunity for our top runners to shine. We feel we got the balance right. The atmosphere was electric!"

This year **MAUNGARAKI SCHOOL** ran two separate events. For the competitive event, years 4-8 students opted into challenge themselves and attempt to qualify for the zone event. To ensure all tamariki were still included in some way, those who chose not to participate were dotted around the course and tasked with encouraging their peers. A week later, followed a new and innovative approach to a whole school event. Again in theme, Maungaraki opted for an obstacle style fun run.

Teacher Alle Pollard reflects that the focus "was on being physically active and building skills such as communication, persistence, resilience, problem solving skills, and teamwork, while getting muddy and wet, being with our peers and having a load of fun while doing it"

Whanau got involved too with parents and caregivers being invited to join the tamariki on the course. Alle comments that **"the afternoon had a real community vibe and students, teachers, staff, whānau, were all able to take part together."**

Motivated to make change after reading the PE New Zealand position paper on Primary School Cross Country events, a discussion was sparked among staff as to how they go about balancing competitive and participation based physical activity offerings. This ultimately led to the school revisiting the actual purpose of cross country and their motivations for doing it. What resulted was a whole lot of colour, laughter and smiles as demonstrated in the pictures captured.

During the process of instigating change, student voice was gathered. Alle notes how **"interesting it was that their statistics aligned to those presented in the PENZ report"** with students echoing the national statistics where one in every four students identify as not enjoying the traditional cross country run (PENZ).



Like the other kura featured here, Maungaraki note the importance of the cross country event, stating *"we value competition, but we also want an event where the whole school can participate and feel successful in their own experiences"*

***"Everybody in Rm 4 had a great time being bombarded with colour and sprayed with too much water but also helping out with the various activities was exciting as well."
Racquel, Yr 8***

***"My FUN RUN experience was great because of how much colour and mud that got on me. The FUN RUN was enjoyable as well because of the water and slip n slide. I want to do it again next year."
Xavier, Yr 4***

KONINI PRIMARY SCHOOL took the traditional cross country event to the next level with the **Konini X Challenge!** Developed with support from a Nuku Ora Healthy Active Learning Advisor, the model created saw students competing 8-10 challenges over the course of a 30 minute period. Challenges included an obstacle course, throwing foam javelins, knocking down cans, spelling mystery words, scoring goals, dancing, skipping, sack races, water play, and having their photo taken! The clever design of the challenge removed the concept of being measured with students opting into challenges in whatever order they wished. A diversity of challenges, both physical and intellectual helped to ensure the event was appealing to all tamariki.



***"I loved jumping and skipping, it was really fun!"
Whio Class student***

***"This is purely a fun event and our focus is for students to participate and give as many activities a go as possible."
Matt Pegg - Assistant Principal***

***"having the choice to go wherever you wanted was cool!"
Kotare Class student***

The event served as a leadership opportunity for Konini's Year 6 students, who were tasked with managing stations for the junior school. Community links were drawn on too - the partnership between Konini & Wainuiomata Intermediate coming to fruition with year 7&8 students leading senior version of the X Challenge.

Interestingly over the course of the event, the **school tracked the steps of one 6 year old student. Staggeringly, the distance covered was triple that of the traditional event!**

To ensure student voice is considered in future decision making, student feedback was collated after the event. **When asked whether they'd prefer the X Challenge or the traditional running event, one classroom, Piwakawaka voted 19:1 in favour of the Konini X Challenge!**

Whilst the X Challenge was far from a traditional cross country event, the school continues to cater for the needs of those who wish to compete at that level, with a team being organised and sent to the upcoming cluster event.



Hutt City Council & the Lower Hutt Primary Schools' Sports Association are fully supportive of innovative approaches to cross country events whereby participant experience is prioritised and where schools seek to meet the needs of all akonga.

Ka Pai to the five schools featured here!

We know that these schools certainly aren't the only ones and that lots of others across the city are making positive changes.

Should your kura be interested in making change to your traditional cross country event and are unsure where to start, feel free to get in touch with the Active in the Hutt team for support – active@huttcity.govt.nz

