

Real World Ready

A Pedagogical Framework for AI in New Zealand Schools

The Problem Every Principal Is Sitting With

Your staff are divided. Some are using AI in their classrooms. Some are refusing to. Some are waiting to see what you say. Parents are asking questions you don't yet have clean answers to. Your board wants a policy. Your teachers want guidance. And the Ministry hasn't given you anything useful to stand on.

You are being asked to take a position on a tool before anyone has given you a principled reason to take any position at all.

That is the problem this paper addresses.

The Wrong Conversation

The public debate about AI in schools has settled into two camps. Ban it or embrace it. Both positions are argued loudly. Neither helps you on Monday morning.

The ban position is understandable but not sustainable. AI is already in your school, in students' pockets, in their homes, in their workflows. A ban manages anxiety. It does not manage learning.

The embrace position is equally unhelpful in its uncritical form. Enthusiasm about AI as a teaching tool does not tell you what good learning looks like when AI is present. It does not tell you how to know whether students are thinking or outsourcing their thinking. It does not give you anything to say to a parent who asks whether their child is actually learning.

The problem with both positions is that they start with the tool. Real World Ready starts with the learning.

A Different Starting Point

Real World Ready is a learning design methodology. It was developed by Field-Based STEM from years of delivering authentic, place-based learning experiences across Aotearoa New Zealand. It is now available as a school-wide framework applicable across every subject area.

The central principle is straightforward.

When students encounter something real, in a specific place, with genuine stakes, they think. When they think, they learn. When they learn, they own it.

AI enters this methodology as an amplifier of that thinking, not a replacement for it. A student who has stood in a stream, or performed to a real audience, or walked the ground where history happened, or heard a language spoken by someone who has spoken it their whole life, arrives at the desk with something that belongs to them. AI helps them extend it. It cannot manufacture it.

That sequence, authentic experience first, AI as extension, is the foundation of a defensible position on AI in your school.

What This Gives You

Real World Ready gives you four things a policy alone cannot.

A pedagogical argument, not a technology argument. When a parent asks whether students are really learning or just using AI, you can answer on learning grounds. The methodology requires that thinking is made visible through design. Students do not just produce outputs. They show the decisions that produced them.

A school-wide framework, not a departmental programme. The methodology works in science, social studies, the arts, languages, technology, physical education, and mātauranga Māori. The authentic experience changes by subject. The learning architecture does not. A principal who adopts Real World Ready is not trialling a programme in one department. They are adopting a position across the school.

Integrity by design, not by detection. AI integrity in most schools is currently managed through suspicion and detection tools. Real World Ready replaces that with design. When the authentic experience is the foundation, a student cannot fake having been there. When the learning task requires students to show their reasoning, the thinking is observable regardless of whether AI was used. Teachers stop asking "did they use AI?" and start asking "can they show their thinking?" That is a question the methodology is built to answer.

An equity argument that holds up. Some of the students most harmed by the current uncertainty around AI are the ones who have always been underserved by traditional approaches to literacy and assessment. For students who think through doing, making, and performing, AI used within this methodology is not a shortcut. It is a continuity bridge between the authentic experience and the classroom task. Real World Ready does not fix the assessment system. It designs around its limitations in a way that is defensible and equitable.

What This Looks Like in Your School

A Real World Ready learning experience has a consistent shape across every subject area.

Students encounter something real in a specific place and arrive with observations, data, questions, or experiences that belong to them. They bring that to AI as a thinking partner, extending their analysis or inquiry. They complete a short structured trace of their reasoning, making their thinking visible to their teacher. They produce an outcome they own because they owned the experience it came from.

The teacher can see the thinking at every stage. The student cannot be replaced by AI in this sequence because the experience that starts it is irreducible. You cannot generate a macroinvertebrate count, a rehearsal, a community interview, or a walk along a historic shoreline from a keyboard.

Three practical routines sit inside this framework that teachers can use from day one.

The 3-3-3 Trace Map asks students to name three decisions, three reasons, and three evidence points from their learning experience. It is hard to fake and straightforward to assess.

The Decision Trace Conference is a two to three minute structured conversation in which a student points to where their thinking changed. Used consistently, it becomes part of classroom culture rather than a compliance exercise.

The Evidence Overlay travels with any finished piece of work. It names the claims made, the sources used, the limitations acknowledged, and one verification move the student made. It separates the product from the proof of thinking.

These routines do not require specialist training. They require consistent use.

The Mātauranga Māori Dimension

Real World Ready speaks directly to one of the areas where NZ schools have been looking hardest for coherent guidance.

Mātauranga Māori is place-based by nature. It is transmitted through relationship, grounded in specific land and community, and held by people rather than contained in curricula. The Real World Ready framework is designed around exactly this kind of knowledge. Authentic experience before analysis. Relationship before inquiry. Place as teacher.

Where Real World Ready operates in contexts that draw on mātauranga Māori, it does so with explicit acknowledgment of the obligations that authentic engagement carries. Tikanga and the mana of knowledge holders come first. The methodology supports and structures the experience. It does not define or contain it.

For schools working toward more genuine integration of mātauranga Māori, this methodology provides a principled structure that takes those obligations seriously rather than treating them as additions to an otherwise unchanged programme.

The AI Integrity Question Answered

The question boards and parents are asking is not really about AI. It is about whether students are learning. AI has made that question more urgent. It has not changed what a good answer looks like.

A good answer looks like this: our students begin with a real experience in a real place. They bring genuine observations and questions to their work. They use AI to extend their thinking, not replace it. Their teachers can see the reasoning that produced their work because that reasoning is built into the task design. Students who thrive in authentic contexts, including students who have historically struggled with traditional classroom approaches, remain engaged through AI as a continuity tool rather than a shortcut.

That is a position a principal can take to a staff meeting. It is a position a board can put in front of parents. It is a position that points to learning rather than to technology.

Real World Ready is the methodology that makes that position possible.

Taking the Next Step

Real World Ready is available now, in any subject area, with or without an external facilitator.

The methodology document is publicly available and provides the full framework any teacher can begin working within immediately. A growing professional community of specialist facilitators across Aotearoa New Zealand supports schools in delivering authentic experiences across disciplines, from environmental science to performing arts, from local history to te reo Māori.

Schools that adopt Real World Ready are not trialling a product. They are taking a pedagogical position on learning that happens to give them a coherent, defensible answer to the most pressing question in NZ education right now.

For more information or to begin a conversation about adoption in your school, contact Tony Jones, tony@field-basedstem.kiwi

Real World Ready is a methodology developed by Field-Based STEM. It is designed for adoption across all subject areas and all school contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand.