



Bridging the distance between online learners

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu builds a closer relationship with students through engaging online learning

Adopting D2L's Brightspace platform has enabled Te Kura, New Zealand's largest school, to make the transition from correspondence courses to online distance education. Video capabilities enable teachers and students to learn together in new ways, while smart grading tools reduce the administrative burden for the school's busy faculty.

At a Glance

Client: Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu

Learners: 23,000

Industry: K-12

Website: tekura.school.nz

Platform/Features:

- D2L's Brightspace platform
- Quick Eval
- Video Assignments

Interviewees:

- Jen Brookes, Learning Systems Lead, Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu

Highlights:

- Brightspace provides a comprehensive environment to support the entire student learning journey.
- Video assignments help teachers identify language and literacy challenges faster.
- Quick Eval enables teachers to save hours on grading students' assignments.
- Direct contact with D2L's product development team helps Te Kura build a platform that is perfectly aligned with its unique needs.



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Jen Brookes, Learning Systems Lead, Te Kura

Challenge

Engaging students in distance education

Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (Te Kura) is New Zealand’s largest school. Formerly known as The Correspondence School, it specialises in working with students from a wide range of backgrounds and with diverse learning needs, both in New Zealand and overseas.

The school has regional offices in Wellington, Auckland, Hamilton and Christchurch, as well as working with clusters of students in smaller communities—but its primary teaching model is distance education. When Te Kura decided to modernise its highly successful correspondence courses and move to delivering all its programs online, it took a step into the unknown.

“We were moving from a paper-based delivery to an online delivery and there was a lot of risk and apprehension,” says Jen Brookes, learning systems lead at Te Kura. “Because we are a distance education provider, it’s really important that we are able to get to know our students. Many of our students, we don’t even meet face-to-face.”

In short, it was vital for the new learning management system to engage Te Kura’s students and bring them closer to their teachers. On the other hand, if the new platform introduced any friction into the learning experience, it could push students further away.



Solution

A mindful approach to online learning

In its search for the most powerful, user-friendly learning management system on the market, Te Kura considered solutions from various vendors. Once the Te Kura team saw D2L's Brightspace platform, they were confident that they had found the right solution.

“If you need a robust, quality learning management system that's being constantly improved with a mindful approach to development, that's Brightspace,” says Jen Brookes. “The D2L team really put a lot of effort into the student experience, the teacher experience, the design of the platform, and the fact that all the components are integrated so beautifully.”

Te Kura particularly appreciates the interactive experience that Brightspace offers students and teachers through its video capabilities.

“The video assignments opened up a whole new world for us,” says Jen Brookes. “In many cases, the first time we ever hear a student speak is in a video they upload to Brightspace. By watching that video, we're able to pick up if there are any speech or language difficulties that we might have missed if we only had their written assignments.”

The school is also taking advantage of Brightspace to streamline administrative tasks—for example, using Quick Eval to reduce the time teachers need to spend on grading assignments.

“We turned on Quick Eval as soon as we heard that Brightspace was launching it. We just had to have it! The positive feedback from our teaching staff has been incredible. It's made things so much easier for them.”

Jen Brookes, Learning Systems Lead, Te Kura

She adds: “The D2L team are so fantastic to work with; we've been able to collaborate directly with their product managers and designers. It feels a little bit like cheating—we're going straight to the source to tell them what we need and why we need it, instead of waiting in line or just hoping that someone is listening!”



“With Brightspace, we don’t have to tell our students to download a lot of software, sign up for multiple accounts or log into different systems. Everything’s available in one environment.”

Jen Brookes, Learning Systems Lead, Te Kura

Result

Bridging the distance between learners

With the Brightspace platform up and running, Te Kura has made a seamless transition to its new online distance education model. The engaging course content helps students focus on their studies, and the ability to interact online with their teachers and their peers means that nobody needs to feel that they are studying alone—even if they are hundreds of kilometers from their nearest fellow-student.

Jen Brookes comments: “It’s harder to be engaged when you’re learning at a distance: you’re at home, you might be at the library, you’re not in that classroom environment. That’s why it’s so important to make the experience as seamless and immersive as possible. With Brightspace, we don’t have to tell our students to download a lot of software, sign up for multiple accounts or log into different systems. Everything’s available in one environment.”

“What I love most about Brightspace is the fact that we took a bit of a risk in moving to an online delivery model, and it has worked. Our students are quite savvy: with Brightspace, when they’ve done something once, they know what they’re doing. It gives them everything they need for online learning, and it’s really working.”

Jen Brookes, Learning Systems Lead, Te Kura