

GROWING SKILFUL LEARNERS

THE GLENVIEW PRIMARY LEARNERSHIP STORY
HOW BUILDING LEARNERSHIP EXTENDED
ACHIEVEMENT FOR EVERY LEARNER

A Case Study by **James Anderson**



James Anderson

WWW.JAMESANDERSON.COM.AU



The Question Every School Leader Should Ask

Every school says it wants students to become independent learners.

But how would you know if it was actually happening?

When New Zealand's Education Review Office visited Glenview Primary School in 2025, they asked a question that cuts to the heart of that challenge:

“Is this just laminated on the walls — or is it happening for kids?”

It's an uncomfortable question for any school. Posters are easy to create. Mission statements are easy to write. But whether students themselves understand how learning works — and whether they can take increasing responsibility for it — is a very different matter.

At Glenview, the answer came from a Year 6 student.

“

When primary school students start asking for harder work, you know something fundamental has shifted.

During a routine lesson she looked at her work, paused, and said to her teacher:

“Man, I’m in my comfort zone today. This isn’t good enough. Give me something else.”

For many educators, that sentence would be remarkable. Students asking for harder work is not a common classroom problem.

But at Glenview it wasn’t unusual.

Over the past three years the school has deliberately focused on developing what we call Learnership — the expertise of learning itself. Rather than concentrating solely on teaching content, the school began systematically helping students become more skilful at navigating challenge, effort, mistakes, feedback and the Habits of Mind that drive growth.

As students became more skilful learners, their relationship with learning began to change.

Three years later, the school’s Learnership Diagnostic showed a clear shift in student behaviour — with Independent Learner behaviours rising substantially and Agile Learner behaviours nearly doubling.

This case study explains how that shift occurred.



The Illusion of Success: A Problem Hiding in Plain Sight

“

We used to say that we’ve got compliant students... They were just being fed without them wanting to be fed,”

Deputy Principal Corey Redwood

Glenview Primary School looked successful. Their 446 students from Years 1-6 were compliant, well-behaved, and meeting curriculum standards — the mandated achievement benchmarks used across New Zealand schools. In a culturally diverse community — 40% Māori, 30% New Zealand European/Pākehā, 20% Asian — teachers worked hard, students followed instructions, and parents were generally satisfied.

But Principal Carl Allan and his leadership team recognised something troubling beneath this apparent success.

“We used to say that we’ve got compliant students... They were just being fed without them wanting to be fed,” explains Deputy Principal Corey Redwood. These students displayed what educators often mistake for excellent *learning*: sitting quietly, following instructions, meeting standards, completing tasks without complaint.

This is a dominant pattern across education systems — a culture of teaching and performance that achieves *learning* without developing *learners*. The underlying assumption is that growth comes primarily from skilful teaching. But the *Learning Equation* tells us otherwise:

Growth

=

Skilful
Teaching

x

Skilful
Learning

“

**What looked like
success was actually
dependency in
disguise.”**

Glenview had spent years optimising one side of that equation. The other side — the expertise learners develop in learning itself — had never been explicitly built. And because it's a multiplier, not an addition, even very skilful teaching will hit a ceiling if skilful learning isn't being built deliberately.

The hidden cost was devastating: students were dependent, passive, and unprepared for challenge without teacher scaffolding.

Here's what “success” actually looked like:

- ▶ Students compared themselves to each other rather than tracking their own growth
- ▶ Students who were achieving highly were left to operate at standard while teachers focused on students who struggled
- ▶ Students stopped when they hit difficulty and looked around for help instead of building strategies
- ▶ Even students who were currently achieving highly couldn't explain how they learned — they just knew how to comply

The brutal truth: even students who were succeeding at school weren't being prepared to thrive in life after school. They could perform when everything was provided for them, but they lacked the agency and capability to direct their own learning and growth.

The breakthrough came when leadership shifted their focus.

Instead of concentrating solely on teaching content, they began deliberately developing students' Learnership — the skills and dispositions required to grow through challenge, effort, mistakes, feedback and the Habits of Mind.

As students became more skilful learners, the outcomes began to change.

Learnership



Learnership is the expertise a person develops in learning itself — the ability to learn well, and to keep getting better at learning. Students build Learnership across five interconnected dimensions: how they respond to challenge, how they invest effort, how they use feedback and ask for advice, how they learn from mistakes, and how they cultivate their Habits of Mind — the problem-solving superpowers that come into play when there's no obvious next step. As Learnership develops, students progress through six learner types, moving from dependence toward genuine agency.



AGILE LEARNER	EMBRACES	CULTIVATES	DESIGNS	TAILORS	GROWING
INDEPENDENT LEARNER	TARGETS	DEVELOPS	USES	REQUESTS	STRIVING
DIRECTED LEARNER	ATTEMPTS	EXTENDS	CORRECTS	RESPONDS	PRODUCING
PERFORMANCE LEARNER	LIMITS	APPLIES	AVOIDS	SELECTS	PERFORMING
BEGINNER LEARNER	REDUCES	DESCRIBES	RECOGNISES	ACKNOWLEDGES	DOING
NON-LEARNER	AVOIDS	IGNORANT	IGNORES	DISREGARDS	WASTES

The fear underneath it all was simple: What if their apparent success — driven by a system that measured achievement but not the capacity to achieve — was actually creating dependency? Glenview was doing education the way the system required, and getting the results the system measured. But those results masked a deeper problem. That's when Carl and his team confronted something uncomfortable: excellence isn't a level you reach — it's a standard you operate by. And a school full of compliant students wasn't operating with excellence — it was meeting benchmarks.

Learner Level Descriptions



“

Excellend isn't a level you reach - it's a standard you operate by”.

- **Non-Learners**
Tend not to participate in learning, preferring to avoid the work altogether.
- **Beginning Learners**
Take the path of least resistance. They see learning as tasks to complete rather than abilities to build.
- **Performance Learners**
Do their best to meet expectations, but often avoid challenges that might lead to improvement.
- **Directed Learners**
Follow the teacher's instructions well. They can move through the learning process when guided, but don't yet command it themselves.
- **Independent Learners**
Set goals and take responsibility for managing their own learning process.
- **Agile Learners**
Seek out challenge because it helps them grow, building abilities today that prepare them for tomorrow.



The Three-Year Journey: Changing Who Carries Responsibility

First Year of Implementation: The Identity Crisis (2022)

The central challenge wasn't curriculum or assessment — it was changing who carried responsibility for learning.

The transformation began with a two-day professional development session that achieved 80-85% staff buy-in. But buy-in isn't transformation. The real work was confronting a fundamental shift in how teachers understood their role.

“

The real shift wasn't curriculum — it was ownership.”

“We had to challenge teacher mindsets first,” Carl explains. “Until you shift those and get critical mass, that's what takes the time.” Progress felt slower before it felt faster.

“

The real shift wasn't curriculum — it was ownership.”

“

The ceiling wasn't in the student. It was in the expectation.

“

The old model sorted students. The new model develops them.”

What Teachers Had to Confront

The deeper shift went beyond teaching practice — it meant confronting assumptions about capability. Experienced, well-meaning teachers had unconsciously developed different expectations for different students. Not through deliberate labelling, but through years of accumulated experience that felt like professional wisdom: *this student will go far, that student will do well to reach standard, and I'd be delighted if this other one just gets through*. Teachers invested their energy accordingly — intensive support for students below standard, maintenance for those at standard, and benign neglect for those who were already achieving.

The Learnership work made visible what had been invisible: **these assumptions weren't observations about student capability. They were ceilings that adults had unwittingly placed on growth.** Once teachers recognised that what happened in the classroom genuinely shaped every student's trajectory — not just the ones they'd already decided had potential — the old model of triaging effort became indefensible. The ceiling wasn't in the student. It was in the expectation.

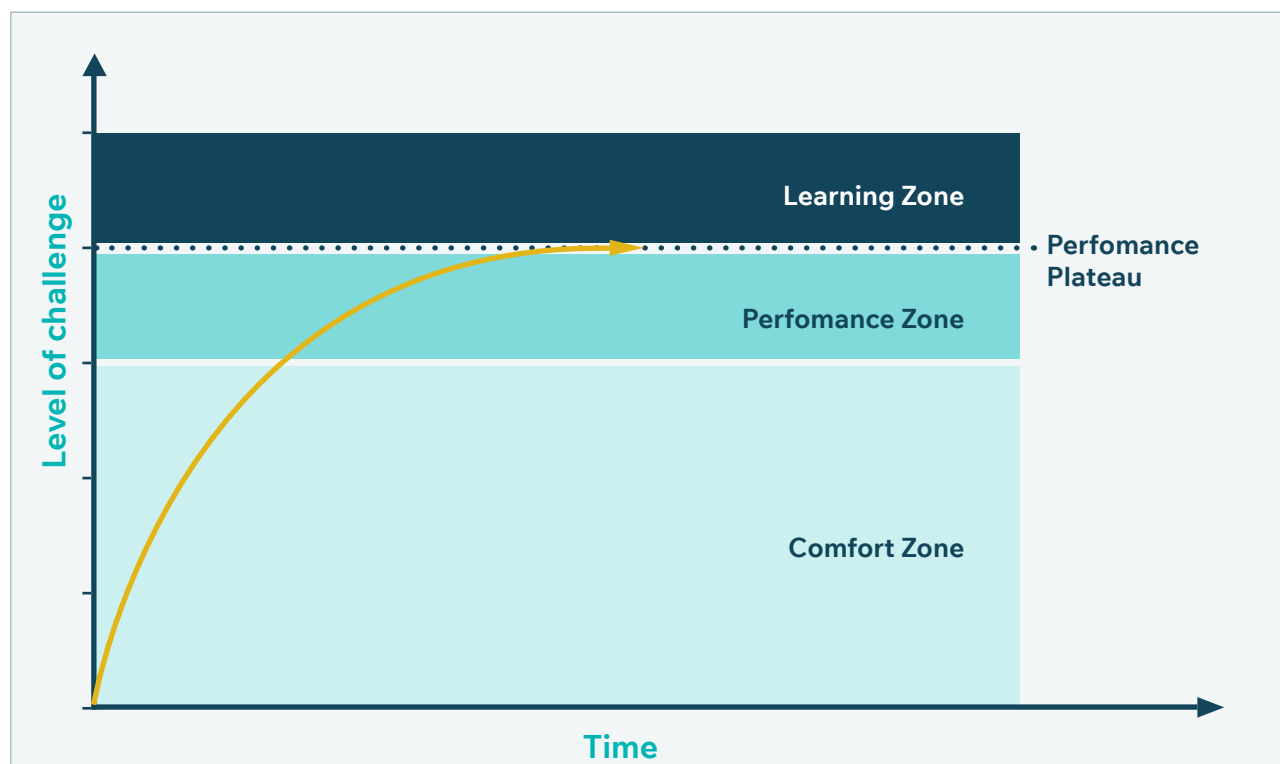
This was perhaps the most confronting element of the first year. It wasn't that teachers had been doing anything wrong by the standards of the system they worked in. It was that the system itself had trained them to accept limits that didn't exist.

Glenview began raising the status of learning — from something done to students, to something students could develop expertise in. To make that possible, teachers needed a shared way to see challenge clearly — and students needed language to name it.

Parents inadvertently reinforced the old model. Students who had everything done for them at home — shoes tied, lunches made, problems solved — naturally looked around for help rather than building capacity through challenge when they encountered difficulty at school.

A New Language for Challenge

The first year focused heavily on introducing the Learning Zones framework, which gave students and teachers a common language for challenge and growth.



Learning Zones Framework



The Learning Zones describe four distinct relationships a learner can have with the work in front of them. In the Comfort Zone, work feels easy and familiar — safe, but not producing growth. In the Learning Zone, work is appropriately challenging — this is where genuine growth happens. In the Performance Zone, learners apply what they’ve already mastered under pressure. In the Aspirational Zone, work exceeds what the learner can currently manage — effort is real but growth is limited because the challenge is too great.

Understanding these zones gives teachers a diagnostic tool and gives students language to name their own experience — and to advocate for the challenge they need.

This framework shifted something fundamental. For the first time, students had language to describe where they were in relation to challenge — and to request more of it. Teachers had a way to see, clearly, which students were coasting and which were overwhelmed. The school initially over-emphasised Learning Zones at the expense of other Learnership elements, treating it as “everything” rather than one component of a comprehensive approach. This was a necessary early mistake — the framework was powerful enough to generate momentum, even before the full system was in place.

“

The teachers are there to challenge the students, not to help them.”

“

Zone calibration turned intuition into diagnosis.”

The First Signs of Shift

But something crucial was happening: students began taking responsibility for naming their experience and requesting challenge. They weren't waiting for teacher permission. They were using the language of zones to articulate what they needed.

Once students could do that, the question became: Why had teachers been doing this work for them?

First Year of Implementation: The Identity Crisis (2022)

Year two marked the move from inspiration to systematic change. The school developed a comprehensive scope and sequence that deliberately built Learnership capabilities across all six years of primary schooling.

This was when the fundamental pedagogical shift crystallised: **“The teachers are there to challenge the students, not to help them.”** Not by stepping back — but by teaching students what to do when learning gets hard, then refusing to take that work back off them.

The scope and sequence allowed teachers to challenge without guilt because students had been explicitly taught how to respond to challenge. **Teachers began permanently shifting their language** — focusing on process rather than outcomes, and on growth rather than status.

Zone calibration — the practice of accurately reading which zone each student was operating in — became a powerful diagnostic tool. It revealed two problems hiding in plain sight. Students who consistently struggled weren't lacking effort or capability — they were operating in their aspirational zone all day, every day. As Carl describes it: “It's hard work doing hill sprints every day, all day.” For some students, the entire school day was the equivalent of being publicly exposed at their weakest — not for one uncomfortable event, but across every subject, every lesson. Their effort was real, but it was effort as expense — energy spent surviving rather than growing. Once teachers could see this through the zones framework, their response shifted from managing behaviour to managing cognitive load — building in deliberate reset time rather than pushing harder.

Conversely, students who were already achieving at or above standard often appeared engaged but were actually cruising in their

“

Effort can be expense — energy spent surviving rather than developing.”

comfort zone — busy, but not growing. They were doing lots of work without being in their learning zone. Their effort produced completion without growth. Once teachers could see both patterns clearly, they could calibrate challenge appropriately: moving students into their learning zone where effort becomes investment — energy directed at genuine growth — and recognising when others needed to come back to their comfort zone to recharge before the next push.

But the deeper question emerged: If students could handle this responsibility, how much of their dependence had been designed by adults?

Third Year of Implementation: The Cultural Proof (2024-2025)

By the third year, the transformation was evident to external observers. When New Zealand’s Education Review Office visited, they asked the question that every leader fears: *“Is this just laminated on the walls — or is it happening for kids?”*

They got their answer from the students. Students responded with clarity and confidence. **“The kids were just able to articulate far better than us the difference of learning zones and when things are hard and what to do,”** Carl observed.

Students had become the best evidence of cultural change:

- ▶ They asked for harder work when comfortable
- ▶ They compared their own pre- and post-assessments rather than comparing with peers
- ▶ They could explain their learning process to adults without teacher prompting
- ▶ They embraced optional challenges like cross-country (record attendance) and performing arts (240 students — 50% of the school)

The cultural transformation was captured in a simple but profound change: the school’s vision evolved from “Be Our Best” to “Better Our Best.” This shift from a fixed state to continuous improvement embodied the new reality — both teachers and students now shared responsibility for learning and growth.

The external test would come when evaluators looked past documentation and into classrooms.

“

The proof wasn’t on the walls — it was in student voice.”



The Evidence: When Students Own Their Learning

“

Learnership is proven when students articulate it independently.”

The Ultimate Test: Student Voice

The most compelling evidence came when a student left Glenview for a private school interview. Asked about learning, she delivered a sophisticated explanation of learning, challenge, and Learnership that stunned three experienced educators.

Carl recalls that the Deputy Principal and two other staff were stunned. Their response was immediate: “Holy shit, I couldn’t have explained it better... if we could write the answer for her, we couldn’t have written it better.”

When your students can explain learning better than the adults assessing them, you know Learnership is real.

External Validation

The most powerful ongoing validation comes from New Zealand’s Education Review Office, the government body that evaluates all schools. Their 2025 report specifically highlighted Glenview’s work: **“A deliberate focus on developing students’ confidence and understanding of how they learn is well embedded across the school.”**

The ERO found that:

- ▶ A large majority of students meet or exceed expected curriculum levels in reading and mathematics
- ▶ The school has **“significantly extended achievement and progress for learners working at or above curriculum levels”**
- ▶ Students demonstrate **“high levels of engagement in challenging and meaningful learning opportunities”**

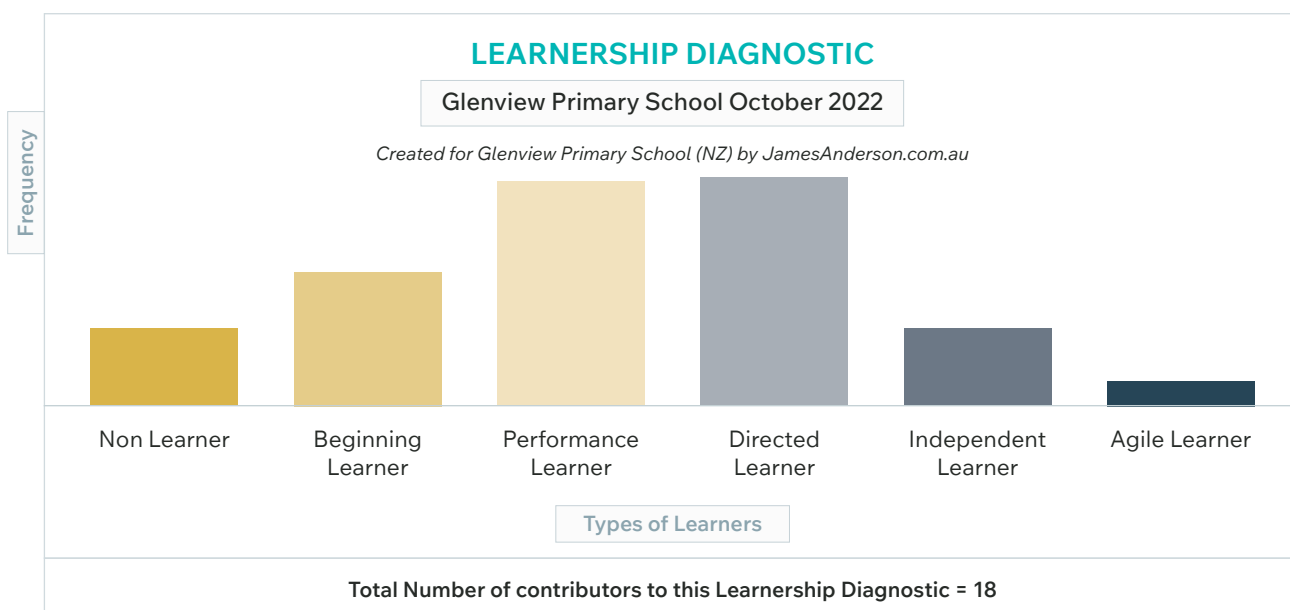
“

When your students can explain learning better than the adults assessing them, you know Learnership is real.

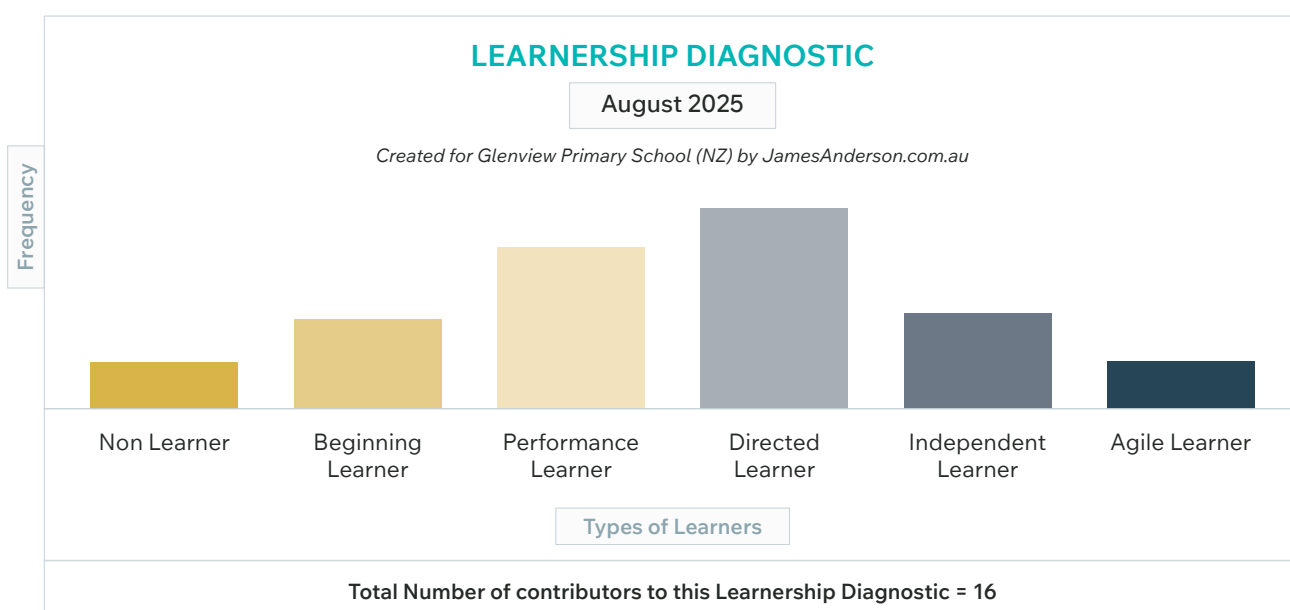
Measuring Cultural Shift: The Learnership Diagnostic

Student voice and external validation tell one part of the story. The Learnership Diagnostic makes the cultural shift visible.

The diagnostic captures how frequently students display behaviours associated with each of the six levels of learnership — from Non-Learner through to Agile Learner. Teachers completed it at baseline (October 2022) and again three years into implementation (August 2025).



To learn more about Learnership, and how it can be developed, please visit www.jamesanderson.com.au © James Anderson 2021



To learn more about Learnership, and how it can be developed, please visit www.jamesanderson.com.au © James Anderson 2021

Schools interested in measuring their own learning culture can access the Learnership Diagnostic at www.learnership.app using the code Case-Study.

In 2022, Glenview's profile was weighted toward Directed and Performance Learner behaviours. Students were responsive, compliant, and capable when guided — they could meet expectations within structure. Independent and Agile behaviours were present but comparatively limited.

Three years later, the distribution had significantly shifted upward across the matrix. Directed Learner behaviours remained strong — an important foundation in any effective school — but as Non Learner and Beginning Learner behaviours decreased, Independent Learner behaviours rose substantially, and Agile Learner behaviours nearly doubled.

That last point deserves attention. Agile behaviours are the markers of students who can navigate genuine uncertainty — who adapt their approach, direct their own learning, and persist productively when there's no obvious next step. Seeing those behaviours double in frequency signals something deeper than compliance or even competence. It signals students developing genuine learner agency. Students who will thrive in an increasingly uncertain and rapidly changing world.

This distinction matters. Performance and Directed behaviours reflect students who can succeed within a structured system. Independent and Agile behaviours reflect students who can go beyond it. Glenview didn't trade structure for freedom. They retained strong foundations while building the ability to exceed them.

The diagnostic quantified what student voice and classroom observation had already revealed: this wasn't anecdotal change — it was measurable cultural movement. The shift wasn't just in individual learners. It was in the learning culture of the school itself. Students weren't just achieving more. They were becoming more skilful learners. And this behavioural shift preceded the academic gains that followed.

The Learnership Diagnostic now forms part of Glenview's ongoing review cycle — allowing leaders to track not just what students are achieving, but who they are becoming as learners.



**Data validated the shift.
Students embodied it.”**

Academic Achievement as Consequence, Not Goal

“We’re starting to get results that we’ve never had at Glenview in the history that I’ve been here, and I’ve been here a decade,” Carl reports.

Standardised test results were so strong that leadership initially questioned their validity. **“I was like, did the teachers do the test? It’s that good,”** Carl jokes, reflecting genuine surprise at the dramatic improvement.

But here’s the crucial insight: **the academic results followed naturally from students developing Learnership.** They weren’t the goal — they were the consequence of cultural change.

Cultural Indicators: The Real Measures

The most telling evidence lies in changed behaviours:

- ▶ Students seeking challenge rather than avoiding it
- ▶ Record participation in optional activities requiring effort and challenge
- ▶ Teachers permanently shifting language and expectations
- ▶ Parent feedback like **“I wish I was taught this when I was a student”**



The Trade-offs: What This Change Really Costs

Glenview's transformation offers crucial insights for other schools, including the honest acknowledgment of what this change demands.

Time: The Non-Negotiable Investment

"It's not a fast process" — sustainable change requires 3+ years of consistent focus. This isn't a program you implement; it's a fundamental shift in "the way learning gets done around here."

The Emotional Cost

Carl describes their approach as the **"Mercedes-Benz model of professional development"** — substantial, sustained investment rather than one-off workshops. But the real cost isn't financial — it's emotional. Teachers had to confront assumptions they didn't know they held and change practices that had defined their careers. That takes courage, and it takes time.

“

When both sides of the equation are active, regression becomes impossible.”

Leadership Consistency: Systems Over Shortcuts

Sustained professional learning replaced episodic initiatives. Coaching, mentoring, and shared language became the norm — not add-ons. There were no shortcuts through the discomfort of change.

With hindsight, the leadership team would introduce the scope and sequence earlier. Early momentum came from Learning Zones, but without a system behind it, teachers initially treated it as the work — rather than a gateway into deeper Learnership.



Sharing the cognitive load of learning with students didn't diminish the teacher's role. It enriched it.

Strategic Integration: Beyond Add-On Programs

Learnership became central to Glenview's 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, with "Embed the James Anderson Learnership Approach" written into official school policy. This wasn't something done alongside regular work — it became the foundation of how the school operates.

Once both sides of the Learning Equation were activated — skilful teaching and skilful learning working together — the school couldn't go back to the old model. And here's what surprised them: sharing the cognitive load of learning with students didn't diminish the teacher's role. It enriched it. Teachers found themselves with more time for the work they loved — deeper curriculum, richer feedback, more meaningful relationships — because students were carrying their share of the learning.



“

When culture stabilises, evolution begins.”

Looking Forward: When Culture Becomes Identity

As Glenview enters its fourth year of Learnership implementation, the focus has shifted from establishment to sustainability and evolution.

Continuing Evolution

The school continues questioning assumptions. Carl now wonders whether their mission statement — “causing learning in a safe and happy environment” — keeps them “soft,” reflecting the ongoing push to challenge expectations.

“If you don’t talk about Learnership, what are you talking about?”

Carl asks. **“It should be our core business.”** This captures how thoroughly Learnership has become embedded in the school’s identity.

Supporting New Staff

With six new staff members joining in 2026, Glenview maintains its commitment to proper induction. “They need the magic of that first day. Because they need to experience that same shift we all experienced — and ask the questions we asked.”

The school has policies and practices ensuring “the way learning gets done around here” remains consistent despite staff changes.

But the deeper shift means new staff don't just learn procedures — they discover what happens when students develop genuine Learnership.

Broader Influence

“Learnership is certainly here to stay at Glenview Primary School.”

The ERO validation provides powerful evidence that encourages other schools to consider similar approaches.

The question isn't whether this approach works — it's whether other leaders are ready to develop skilful learning as deliberately as they develop skilful teaching.



What Glenview Actually Did

- YEAR 1** • Two-day professional learning launch. Introduced Learning Zones framework as common language. Focused on shifting teacher mindsets about student capability. 80-85% initial staff buy-in.
- YEAR 2** • Developed comprehensive scope and sequence building Learnership capabilities across Years 1-6. Systematic coaching and mentoring embedded. Zone calibration became diagnostic practice.
- YEAR 3** • Cultural proof—ERO validation, student voice evidence, academic results as consequence of cultural change. Vision evolved from “Be Our Best” to “Better Our Best.”

ONGOING

Learnership embedded in 2022-2025 Strategic Plan. Staff induction process aligned. Professional learning sustained, not episodic. New staff receive dedicated introduction to the approach.

NON-NEGOTIABLES THROUGHOUT

Shared language (Learning Zones + Learnership), explicit teaching of learner behaviours, scope and sequence across all year levels, leadership follow-through via coaching and induction. They protected time for coaching and calibration — not as an add-on, but as the work.



The Questions Glenview Forces You to Ask

Before you consider whether you want what Glenview achieved, ask yourself these questions:

- 01 Are your students learning — or being taught?
- 02 Who carries responsibility for learning in your classrooms — teachers, students, or both?
- 03 Are students who are currently achieving highly being stretched into their Learning Zone — or protected from challenge?
- 04 Could your students explain their own learning process without you present?
- 05 Is your school's success preparing students for life after school — or just for more school?

“

**Learnership
doesn't
just change
classrooms. It
changes schools.”**

If these questions create discomfort, you're not alone. Glenview's leadership team faced the same uncomfortable recognition: apparent success might actually be creating dependency.

The transformation they achieved demonstrates that fundamental change in school culture is both possible and measurable. Their journey offers a roadmap for moving beyond compliance to capability — but only for schools willing to invest in skilful learning as deliberately as they invest in skilful teaching.



THE KEY INSIGHT

Students are capable of far more than we typically expect, but only when we systematically develop their Learnership — not just teach them content.



THE CORE SHIFT

From teachers carrying the full cognitive load to teachers and students sharing responsibility for learning — with students equipped with the frameworks and language to carry their share.



THE TIMELINE REALITY

Sustainable transformation takes 3+ years of consistent, systematic effort. There are no shortcuts.



THE EVIDENCE THAT MATTERS

When your students can articulate their learning journey better than the adults assessing them, you know you've achieved something extraordinary.

As the private school officials said after hearing a Glenview student explain learning: **“Holy hell, can we record that?”**

When that's the response to your students' understanding of learning, you know the culture has truly shifted.

“Is this just laminated on the walls — or is it happening for kids?”

For Glenview, the answer changed everything.

If someone asked your students about their learning, who would answer first — your posters, or your students?



ABOUT JAMES ANDERSON

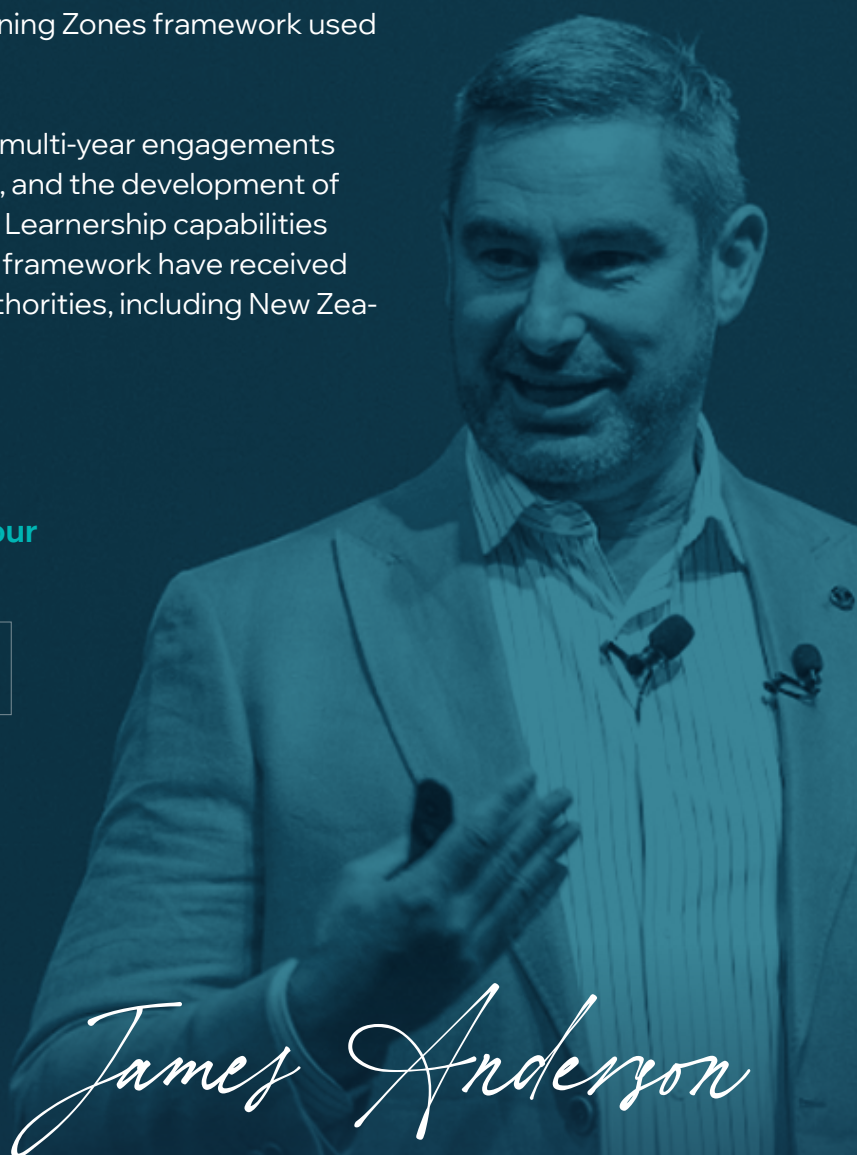
James Anderson works with schools across Australia, New Zealand, and internationally to develop cultures of learning and growth. He is the author of *Learnership* and *The Agile Learner*, and the creator of the Learnership Matrix, the Mindset Continuum, and the Learning Zones framework used by schools throughout Australasia.

He partners with schools through sustained, multi-year engagements — professional learning, leadership coaching, and the development of school-wide scope and sequences that build Learnership capabilities across year levels. Schools implementing his framework have received strong validation from external education authorities, including New Zealand's Education Review Office.

To explore what this could look like in your school, contact James at

✉ james@jamesanderson.com.au

This case study is based on extensive interviews with the Glenview Primary School leadership team and documentation of their three-year Learnership implementation journey.



James Anderson