



EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE  
TE TARI AROTAKE MATAURANGA

## The Collection and Use of Assessment Information: Good Practice in Primary Schools

June 2007



# Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

## The Child – the Heart of the Matter

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We welcome comments and suggestions on the issues raised in education evaluation reports.



## Foreword

The New Zealand Government has grouped its priorities and activities under three themes:

- Economic transformation
- Families, young and old
- National identity.

The Education Review Office (ERO) contributes to these themes through its role of reviewing and reporting on the quality of education in schools and early childhood education services.

ERO's whakataukī demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

*Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa  
The Child – the Heart of the Matter*

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into schools and early childhood services, and this gives us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. During reviews, review officers are often asked for examples of good practice, and of course they find innovative and successful practice in schools and early childhood education services throughout New Zealand. When we collect material on a particular topic for a national report we can also bring together these examples of good practice to accompany the main report.

The best education programmes are based on knowledge of how children learn, and on reliable evidence of that learning. In New Zealand, we need to strengthen our ability to assess what students know and can do, and what works and what does not. Improving student achievement links clearly to the Government's priorities and themes. This ERO report discusses good practice in how primary schools use the information they collect on the achievement of their students, and we hope it will be a useful resource for teachers, principals, and boards of trustees across the country.

The successful delivery of education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together. We hope the information in this report will help them in their task.

Dr Graham Stoop  
Chief Review Officer

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## Introduction

This report builds on the findings of the main report *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*, published by the Education Review Office (ERO) in March 2007.

The aim of this report is to help schools review their assessment practice and how they use assessment information to provide good learning opportunities for their students. This report gives examples of good practice in primary schools and also includes three detailed case studies.

### OVERVIEW OF GOOD PRACTICE IN THE COLLECTION AND USE OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

‘Assessment in education is the process of gathering, interpreting, recording and using information about students’ responses to an educational task.’<sup>1</sup> The assessment of student achievement (ie examining and using information about what students know and can do) is the basis of effective teaching and learning. Unless teachers are knowledgeable about their students’ achievements and interests, they cannot be confident that their teaching is supporting students to achieve to their potential. ‘Overall the purpose of assessment is to improve standards, not merely to measure them.’<sup>2</sup>

Each school in this study developed its processes for the collection and use of assessment information in ways that responded well to students’ needs and interests. The schools displayed common characteristics that contributed to the high quality of the collection and use of assessment information.

Schools demonstrating good practice:

- made certain that teachers had shared understanding about the purpose of assessment;
- made certain that school managers, teachers and students were aware of the rationale for the decisions being made about assessment;
- gave teachers the opportunity for professional development in assessment;
- expected teachers to be knowledgeable about their students’ achievements and interests;
- built strong relationships with students’ families and whānau, that contributed to their children’s learning;
- encouraged teachers to use data effectively to make improvements to their teaching;
- expected assessment information to be drawn from a wide range of sources such as day-to-day interaction with students, analysis of students’ work and from more formally designed and administered assessment tasks;

1 Harlen, Gipps, Broadfoot, Nuttal, “Assessment and the Improvement of Education”, *The Curriculum Journal* 3(3). 1992: pp 214–229.

2 OFSTED. *Review of Secondary Education in England, 1993-97*. 1998. Section 5.6.

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- made sure teachers were able to analyse both numeric and narrative assessment information and interpret the results so these were understood by all potential users of the information;
- encouraged teachers to use formative assessment strategies that ensured the purpose of activities was understood, and students received effective and useful feedback;
- identified groups of students who needed extra assistance and what specific assistance was needed, monitored the students' progress and gathered comprehensive data on their achievements school-wide;
- identified any trends and patterns in students' achievements and compared the achievements of groups of students in the school; and
- established clear expectations for achievement, and for the methods of collating and reporting assessment data, so progress towards agreed achievement targets could be measured.

**REPORT FINDINGS: *THE COLLECTION AND USE OF ASSESSMENT INFORMATION IN SCHOOLS***

The major evaluation of the quality of the collection and use of assessment information in 314 schools occurred during Terms 1 and 2, 2006. ERO evaluated the quality of assessment information in 253 full primary, contributing and intermediate schools, and the findings were reported in *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*, published by ERO in March 2007. In these schools:

- 58 percent of schools had developed and implemented an effective, integrated school-wide approach to assessment processes and information;
- over 80 percent of primary schools had developed effective assessment processes and tools for literacy and numeracy;
- the achievement information in 57 percent of schools demonstrated students' achievement and progress;
- the interaction of assessment with teaching and learning was effective in 54 percent of schools;
- in 42 percent of schools, students used information about their achievement for further learning;
- 43 percent of schools were establishing and using school-wide information to improve student achievement; and
- 51 percent were effective in reporting information about students' achievements to the community.

ERO found that schools' effectiveness in the collection and use of assessment varied considerably, with about half the schools demonstrating effective practice across the whole curriculum. Without worthwhile information teachers cannot be certain their students have learned what they set out to teach, or that the teaching is relevant to the students' learning needs and interests. Where good use is made of assessment, teachers monitor their own teaching and are informed about how well students are learning.

## Methodology

### EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The following evaluation questions provided the framework for both *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* and *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information: Good Practice in Primary Schools*.

- How effectively does the school develop and implement an integrated school-wide approach to assessment practices and information?
- How effectively does assessment information demonstrate students' achievements and progress?
- How effective is the interaction of assessment with teaching and learning?
- How effectively do students use information about their achievement for further learning?
- How effectively is school-wide information established and used to improve student achievement?
- How effectively is information about students' achievements reported to the community?

### SCHOOLS IN THIS STUDY

For this study, ERO selected schools of a variety of roll sizes and deciles located across New Zealand. The majority of schools were small and medium-sized urban schools. The schools were able to demonstrate effective practice in the collection and use of assessment information.



## Examples of good practice

The examples of good practice for each of the evaluation questions have been drawn from data collected from schools for the evaluation report *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*.

The findings are structured under the following headings.

- School-wide approach to assessment practices and information.
- The demonstration of students' achievement and progress.
- The interaction of assessment with teaching and learning.
- Students' use of achievement information for further learning.
- The use of school-wide information to improve student achievement.
- Reporting student achievement information to the community.

These six key aspects overlap and complement each other. They work together and should not be thought of as discrete elements of good practice. For instance, the development of an integrated approach to assessment practice depends on the purposeful interaction of assessment with teaching and learning.

The following sections discuss the key aspects of good practice and include specific examples.

### SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT PRACTICE AND INFORMATION

Schools need good quality information on students' achievements – gained through effective assessment practice – in order to make good quality day-to-day and long-term decisions for students. For assessment systems to work well, teachers need to develop shared understanding about the purposes of assessment and about appropriate learning and achievement expectations for their students.

In evaluating how effectively schools had developed and implemented an integrated school-wide approach to assessment, ERO used the following indicators.

The extent to which the school:

- developed clear, school-wide expectations for student learning and achievement that were well founded and used to inform teaching;
- closely linked assessment processes to stated learning priorities;
- had clear rationale and appropriate school-wide systems; and
- implemented processes to strengthen assessment consistency and judgements.

The following sections highlight, through discussion and specific examples, key aspects of good practice in primary school assessment.

### School-wide expectations and guidelines

Schools demonstrating good practice had clear guidelines and school-wide agreement about assessment practices across learning programmes. They had developed tools to assess student progress and achievement in all curriculum areas, not just literacy and numeracy.

Teachers were familiar with the appropriate administration of assessment tasks. The purpose and usefulness of these activities were also clear. A shared understanding about the value of such tools as the national exemplars, in moderating teacher judgements, was also reached. The analysis of moderated, school-wide data provided information about trends and patterns in students' progress and achievement. Strengths and weaknesses in teaching and learning strategies and initiatives were also identified, informing next steps in school, teacher or programme development as required.

The staff in one small rural school had been involved in a major professional development initiative, *Reporting, Analysis, Planning and Use of Student Achievement Data*, (RAPU project), with the Ministry of Education. Improving assessment practices had been a key focus of this project.

Teachers in this school:

- developed a shared understanding of assessment and this was expressed in a detailed student achievement manual that included sound policy and procedural statements for curriculum delivery, assessment, school expectations and evaluation;
- established clear links between the school-wide approach for collecting achievement data and the annual achievement targets;
- consistently implemented systematic and manageable assessment practices to identify and address student needs;
- viewed guiding documents as 'living documents', that were reviewed, rationalised and improved in light of new information;
- made effective use of the well-documented expectations for achievement at class levels, to collect appropriate and relevant data about individuals and groups of students; and
- used data to provide feedback to students and identify their next learning steps.

### Assessment linked to learning priorities

Well-structured planning and assessment systems helped teachers to link achievement information directly to the identified learning priorities for each student and to overall school priorities for achievement. These explicit connections were a strong feature at all levels in schools with good practice and were well established in all curriculum areas.

Expectations for learning were clearly stated. Student achievement linked to expected learning outcomes, and reflections on teaching practice were analysed in programme planning and evaluation processes.

Students regularly received ongoing, targeted oral and written feedback focused on their identified learning priorities.

In one urban, high decile school, achievement expectations for mathematics, and written and oral language were clearly documented in the school's strategic and annual plans. Teachers had developed a comprehensive set of benchmarks to gauge student progress and achievement in these areas. By highlighting the benchmarks as they were achieved, teachers and students were actively involved in creating a visual record of achievement.

Some assessments, such as in physical education, related to students' skill acquisition in a specific sport. Achievement or progress in students' skills, knowledge, or understanding in other curriculum areas, were often assessed against simply worded statements about the intended learning, that had been developed by teachers with their students. This collaborative direction-setting was part of an inquiry approach to teaching and learning. Links to the curriculum documents, and individual or group levels of achievement, were also clear.

### Clear rationale and appropriate systems

Schools demonstrating good practice provided clear direction for teachers in their assessment and reporting policies. Careful consideration was given to the purpose of assessment and the most appropriate tools for gathering meaningful data about students' learning needs, strengths and progress.

These schools had documented their expectations and requirements for assessment. They often developed detailed manuals on the assessment practices to be used in schools. These included school-wide assessment timelines, long-term plans, comprehensive evaluation frameworks, indicators of progress in literacy and numeracy, and national

expectations for these learning areas. Detailed plans set out summative assessments and records to be completed each year. These included cumulative record cards, standardised tests and samples of information to be collected in students' individual portfolios. These systems made the collection and analysis of data manageable, and gave teachers a chance to plan time management in advance.

Teachers analysed the data collected to support student learning and teaching. Students and teachers often used this information to share learning with parents, for example at 'three-way-conferences'. These valuable meetings promoted strong partnerships in learning between the school and students' families or whānau, by allowing teachers, students and parents to participate in discussions about progress, achievement, and to set future goals.

In one semi-rural school, there was a school-wide system for planning and recording student achievement from all areas of the curriculum. Teachers regularly collected, collated and considered this information. Analysed data, and particularly data relevant to the annual targets, were presented to the board and used to refine existing targets, or consider future strategic directions. For example a connection between physical lethargy and poor results in written language was identified in a group of low achieving boys in Years 2 to 5. In response, relevant strategic goals, based on observational data, were then identified for boys' education and physical education for the following year. At the time of the evaluation, it was too early for ERO to assess the impact on written language results.

### Processes to strengthen consistency and judgements

Effective schools had developed and implemented ongoing review processes for ensuring high levels of consistency of judgements between teachers. Teachers were engaged in high levels of professional dialogue about assessment, consistency and judgements. They introduced moderation by using national exemplars in writing and by sharing portfolio entries. Teachers were involved in professional development in collection and use of assessment across the curriculum.

Key staff members noted that although establishing effective moderation processes for assessment tasks took time, the positive benefits were evident. The professional discussions required to arrive at consensus clarified the rationale for assessment, teachers' increased knowledge of their students' abilities, and led to a deeper understanding of each curriculum area, and of how well their students were achieving.

One provincial city school had a strong system to improve the consistency of judgements made in English and mathematics assessments. All staff contributed to the development and refinement of the school's written guidelines, which outlined the expectations for the administration, marking and checking of assessments at each year level.

Moderation practice, such as one teacher marking all beginning of year tests across the school, was employed to inform feedback discussions with teachers about the consistency of judgements made. Ongoing training and discussion, using benchmarking such as exemplars, further maintained moderation. The requirements for the student portfolios were clearly set out and these valuable records were consistent across the school.

### THE DEMONSTRATION OF STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT AND PROGRESS

Teachers, school managers, parents and students need rich and comprehensive information about what students know and can do. Information on students' progress and development is also necessary.

ERO evaluated how effectively assessment information demonstrated students' achievements and progress in relation to the following indicators.

- Assessment information demonstrated individual students' achievements.
- Assessment information demonstrated individual students' progress.
- Student achievements were referenced to national and local sources of achievement information.
- Decisions on students' achievement were based on multiple information sources.

The following sections discuss how schools have developed good practice across these key aspects, and present some of the important features of good practice.

#### Use of assessment to demonstrate students' achievement and progress

Teachers used a range of locally developed and nationally referenced assessment tools to increase their knowledge of students' achievement. Key personnel, such as senior managers, reviewed the collection, analysis and use of this information to ensure students' achievements and progress were accurately recorded. The resulting records of learning, such as student portfolios, gave a clear and comprehensive picture of student achievement across the curriculum.

In one urban primary school, all students were tested regularly in key aspects of the curriculum using a range of assessment tools, as appropriate and relevant, including the Numeracy Project Assessment (NumPA), Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle), and samples of students' work. The results were noted in computerised assessment records, regularly monitored, updated and referred to by teachers when planning the next steps in teaching and learning. Achievement and progress over each child's school years was demonstrated.

#### Reference to national assessment tools

Where ERO found good practice, teachers did not rely on single sources of information, or single assessment activities to determine student progress or achievement. Informal strategies such as recording anecdotal comments from teacher, parent and whānau observations were complemented by more formal assessments including testing, and conferencing with individual students.

Schools had a large bank of assessment tools available in hard copy and electronic form, so teachers could choose those most appropriate for individual students. This included teaching and learning items as well as diagnostic tests. Specialist assessments were also used.

Schools collected information using a wide range of nationally referenced and school-developed assessment tools including:

- school entry assessments (SEA);
- running records in reading;
- Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR);
- NumPA;
- systematic teacher observation reports and teachers' knowledge of their students;
- national exemplars; and
- asTTle.

In one urban school, electronic and print samples of each student's work were compared with national exemplars. These 'benchmark examples' illustrated learning, achievement and quality in relation to national statements in the key curriculum areas of English, mathematics, science, health and physical education, the arts, and technology. Students and teachers made effective use of these benchmark examples to gauge progress and assess achievement.

National exemplars in writing were used by teachers to develop a comprehensive writing matrix to demonstrate student achievement and progress in written language. Baseline data had been collected and used, as well as moderated across the school, to support teachers' judgements. This consistent school-wide approach meant the school collected rich data that accurately identified individual student achievement and progress in relation to the levels of the national curriculum.

### THE INTERACTION OF ASSESSMENT WITH TEACHING AND LEARNING

Assessment, teaching and learning are interdependent. Teaching activities should not be separate from the assessment activities or from teachers' knowledge of their students' interests, needs and abilities. ERO evaluated how effectively teachers were using assessment information to responsively guide teaching.

ERO evaluated the effectiveness of the assessment with teaching and learning in relation to the following indicators.

- Teachers analysed and interpreted student achievement information.
- Teachers used that information to identify the learning needs of students.
- Teachers used the information to make decisions about learning experiences and programmes for individual and groups of students.
- Teachers advised and guided students to make effective choices about their learning based on assessment information.

The following sections discuss how schools have developed good practice across these key aspects, and give examples.

#### Identifying learning needs

Teachers had rich information about their students' progress and achievement. They gathered both formative and summative information in many different ways and from a variety of assessment tools, tests, observations and conversations. The teachers could analyse the information to develop a useful picture of the progress of individuals and of groups of students. Teachers were skilled at using this analysis to plan teaching and learning programmes.

The integration of assessment with teaching and learning in literacy and numeracy, in particular, was well developed by teachers. They analysed and interpreted student information, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and what was mastered or not achieved. Specific learning needs for individuals and groups of students were identified and planned for. Learning experiences for students were well-targeted, suitably challenging and achievable.

In one urban school, targeted literacy support was given to students with low SEA scores. Focused, five-week book experience programmes helped these students to develop skills and understanding about the language and concepts of print, books and literacy. At times personnel other than the class teachers taught special programmes. On these occasions all relevant achievement information was shared between key adults, increasing the consistency of the messages given to the students. Teachers monitored interventions and modified programmes to meet the students' needs and to inform exit time decisions, as required.

### Decisions about learning experiences and programmes

Assessment formed the basis for planning and teaching in these schools. Sound practice included:

- modelling processes, activities and quality work to show what a completed task would look like and what the expectations for achievement were;
- asking questions that assessed students' levels of understanding, so teaching was building on prior knowledge and students' personal experiences;
- actively involving students in developing clear statements that described the intended learning in simple language;
- establishing individual goals for students;
- developing relevant activities and learning experiences based on the needs and abilities identified for the individual or the group;
- modifying programmes to meet student needs; and
- concluding a lesson by revisiting expected outcomes and discussing students' progress and understanding.

In one urban school, formative assessment was widely used in an inquiry process. Students were involved in topic selection and in the development of inquiry with teachers making effective use of questioning to challenge thinking. Teachers and students developed clear statements that described students' intended learning in simple language. This focused discussion involved each student in their own learning and gave teachers opportunities to revisit these statements throughout the lessons asking: 'How are we going?' and 'What do we need to do now?'



### Learning needs of individuals and groups of students

Effective analysis of data, from many sources, identified where additional support or extension was needed. Teachers used information obtained in individual conferencing to identify where students needed to improve and the next learning steps. Standardised tests, teachers' own judgements, and comparisons with national exemplars were used to assist in making assessment decisions. Each year information from past teachers contributed to the overall knowledge about individual students.

In one urban school, gifted and talented students were identified by using a variety of methods including formative and summative assessment tools, standardised testing, portfolio assessment and nominations by teachers, parents, self, and peers.

Teachers provided differentiated programmes and focused teaching and learning opportunities to cater for their students' diverse learning needs. Senior managers were responsive to the implications of student achievement information, and provided support interventions and resources to help teachers address any issues.

Students in many classes, especially senior students, constructed with their teacher their own goals for learning together. Describing students' intended learning in simply worded statements led to further statements that showed what the learning would look like when it was achieved. Next step goals were then established. The resulting heightened awareness of their goals, progress and next steps increased students' sense of ownership of learning and encouraged them to focus on what they needed to know and do.

### STUDENTS' USE OF ACHIEVEMENT INFORMATION FOR FURTHER LEARNING

When students are well informed about their own progress they are better equipped to make good decisions for future learning. Through careful interpretation of their assessment information, either on their own or with teacher guidance, students can identify what they need to focus on next.

In evaluating how well students used information about their achievement, ERO used the following indicators.

- Students knew about assessment processes.
- Students interpreted and used information for further learning.
- Students knew how well they were learning in relation to personal and curriculum goals.
- Students received appropriate information on what they could do and their next learning steps.

The following sections discuss how schools have developed good practices across these key aspects, and present some of the important features of good practice.

### Student involvement in assessment

In the schools in this study students received useful assessment information, were well informed about their current achievement level, and also knew what they needed to focus on next. Teachers and students discussed how work would be assessed, and the process of learning was clarified so students knew what they were learning and how well they were doing. A practical understanding of assessment processes and expected learning outcomes was clearly articulated.

In one rural school, the use of national exemplars and involvement in professional development helped teachers to become increasingly consistent in their assessment judgements in all curriculum areas. Teachers helped their students reflect on their progress towards their goals. Explicit statements about intended learning and formative feedback had a positive impact on students' understanding of their next steps and level of involvement in learning.

Students were kept well informed about how to be involved in assessment in whole class and in group situations. For instance, in one class the teacher taught the students how to give good quality feedback to peers. In all classes, simply worded statements about students' intended learning were prominently displayed, providing easy reference for students, all of whom regularly assessed their own progress towards these outcomes.

### Students' goal setting

Student involvement in personal goal setting was a well-established, school-wide practice. Staff and students said this heightened focus on achievement was a valuable and useful activity. Students had opportunities to reflect on their goals both informally and formally, with some teachers providing time during the class programme for discussion and additional curriculum support for students toward their specific goals. Students showed a growing awareness of involvement in their own learning, and staff developed their understanding and use of formative feedback to aid this.

Students were involved in a range of self-assessment strategies. As a result students, with their parents and teacher, set their own specific and relevant learning goals. Teachers helped students to interpret the self-assessment data.

In one urban school where students were involved in the assessment process, teachers gave students frameworks for self assessment that challenged them to reflect deeply on the quality of their work. Students also had the opportunity to give their peers constructive feedback. They knew and understood the criteria they were being assessed against and they were encouraged to reflect on their work and assessments when developing new goals. Students kept individual assessment folders to track their academic progress.

The students used the range of information in their individual folders to monitor and evaluate their learning. This information included sheets of benchmarks where the outcomes achieved by students had been highlighted. Discussions of this information and other assessment records allowed the students to know what they had achieved and what would be the next step in their learning.

#### USE OF SCHOOL-WIDE INFORMATION TO IMPROVE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

School-wide achievement data are key sources of information for schools in reviewing the effectiveness of their programme planning for the future, and making resourcing decisions. The information shows school managers and trustees how well the school is meeting the learning needs of all students.

ERO evaluated how effectively school-wide information was analysed and used to improve student achievement in relation to the following indicators.

- Collated assessment information gave useful information about how well students and groups of students were achieving and progressing.
- Information on students' achievement was used to gauge and monitor the effectiveness of teaching and programmes.
- Information on students' achievement was used to identify and monitor groups of students who may have been of interest or concern.
- Trustees used information about students' achievement for making policy, and in strategic planning and resourcing.

The following sections discuss how schools have developed good practice in these key aspects, and present some of the important features of good practice.

### School-wide collation, analysis and use of assessment data

Boards of trustees, senior management teams and teachers in the schools in this study had a strong focus on the collation, analysis and use of achievement information to improve future learning.

In one urban school the analysis of achievement information was cross-referenced, where appropriate, to national exemplars. Senior management and teachers used the results to provide learning experiences that met the specific needs of individuals and groups of students.

Year level cohort achievement data were kept in a cumulative folder that syndicates used to set priorities for achievement for the next year, based on the current year's data and the information from previous years.

Nationally referenced and standardised assessment tools were used in key aspects of the curriculum, such as literacy and numeracy. Information about student achievement school-wide was then collated by teachers, reported to the board, and shared with parents. Through regular reviewing of this information, teachers had a sound knowledge of student achievement across the school and better understanding of their own role in improving overall student outcomes.

### Use of data to evaluate teaching and programmes

Staff carefully interpreted data to identify which teaching practices were successful with groups and individuals, including students who required additional support and extension. Teacher appraisal documents also focused on demonstrable student academic outcomes. Teachers regularly reviewed programmes to identify and address any lack of student progress and achievement.

In one urban school, teachers provided differentiated programmes and focused teaching and learning opportunities to cater for their students' diverse learning needs. Senior managers were responsive to the implications of student achievement information and provided support interventions and resources to help teachers address any issues for those students at risk of underachieving. As a result, student-centred programmes that targeted specific learning needs were provided.

Student achievement information was analysed to gauge student progress, achievement and the effectiveness of specific areas such as teaching practice. Programmes were closely monitored and learning activities modified as required. Syndicates often discussed the implications of achievement data, seeking ways to improve achievement. Through sharing ideas and offering advice about the needs of specific groups or individuals, teachers focused on adding value to student learning. Senior managers assisted with data analysis, not only to strengthen their awareness of student achievement, but also to moderate teachers' assessments in literacy and mathematics. Perception of students' levels of attainment was regularly discussed, as part of this formal moderation process.

#### **Information used to identify and monitor students of interest or concern**

School-wide and classroom specific information was used to identify students with specific educational strengths and needs. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were developed for many of these students, and these guiding documents were reviewed and revised on a regular basis. Strategies, such as in-class support or individualised programmes, supported students that were experiencing difficulty. Students with special abilities were also given extension programmes. These were monitored regularly.

In one urban school information on students' achievement was used to identify groups of students who may be of interest or concern, and to develop interventions, such as early literacy programmes, reading recovery, reading and mathematics support and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programmes.

Interventions and student achievement were monitored over time to ensure groups of students who were underachieving were showing improvement and therefore taken out of the withdrawal programmes. Monitoring helped teachers to provide effective programmes in their classrooms.

### Boards of trustees using information to inform policy, planning and resourcing

Boards of trustees were given detailed information to help them review achievement targets, and to inform their decision making about future resourcing and direction. High quality reports, that demonstrated trends and patterns over time, allowed trustees to recognise areas of concern about student achievement and to approve the implementation of initiatives to support student achievement.

The boards of trustees ensured the focus of school developments remained on student achievement by making explicit links between available information and strategic planning, and identifying processes and resources to support these priorities.

In one urban school the board used information on student achievement in strategic planning, policy direction, and resourcing decisions. Specific targets were set for each year level related to school and national exemplars and included in the annual plan. Detailed analysis of variance monitored the effectiveness of teaching and programmes and adjustments were made where low achievement was identified.

In this school, the board of trustees was strongly aware of its governance roles and responsibilities particularly regarding the National Administration Guidelines requirements for literacy and numeracy, and the provision for students with special learning needs. The principal and senior managers kept the board fully informed of student achievement, especially in literacy and numeracy. The board of trustees was particularly interested in monitoring the ‘achievement progress journey’ of each Year level through the principal’s cumulative folder of achievement information from each school year. Trustees’ understanding of student achievement was sound, due to regular discussion of the achievement information.

### REPORTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INFORMATION TO THE COMMUNITY

Students’ learning and achievement does not only happen in classrooms. Parents, families and school communities should be active contributors to their children’s learning. They need to base their decisions on comprehensive, good quality achievement information about students’ knowledge, abilities and learning needs. An effective three-way learning partnership among student-school-community occurs when all parties are fully informed about achievements and progress.

The National Administration Guidelines<sup>3</sup> state that each board of trustees, with the principal and teaching staff, is required to:

3 Ministry of Education. *The National Administration Guidelines (NAG) 2,3 iii*. Wellington: Ministry of Education, revised 2006.

*Report to students and their parents on the achievement of individual students, and to the school's community on the achievement of students as a whole and of groups, including the achievement of Māori students against (agreed) plans and targets.*

ERO evaluated how effectively information about students' achievements was reported to the community in relation to the following indicators.

- The school sought and valued parents' opinions and ideas when developing and reviewing assessment and reporting processes.
- The school's Māori community or whānau was consulted in developing and making targets known and plans to improve the achievement of Māori students.
- Parents were informed of the school's assessment processes.
- Teachers shared good quality, relevant information about achievements and progress with parents.
- Parents received good quality, relevant information that was helpful for supporting their child's next learning steps.

The following sections discuss how schools have developed good practice across these key aspects, and present some of the important features of good practice.

### Parents' opinions and ideas valued

A key characteristic of these schools was the purposeful and meaningful consultation with parents about assessment processes and how they received information about their children. Parents were asked for feedback in relation to the usefulness and value of reporting processes. They were aware of why assessment activities were conducted and what the results meant for their children.

In one urban school, teachers adapted student reports to show the achievements of specific groups, such as new entrants. Teachers regularly evaluated and improved the effectiveness of reporting on students' progress, based on feedback from parents.

### Māori community or whānau consulted

Robust processes were established for consultation and reporting to the Māori community. A variety of consultative methods, including hui, face-to-face conversations, questionnaires and interviews was used to discover the views of the Māori whānau and the community.

Boards of trustees had developed close relationships with the Māori community, who were involved in establishing processes to improve the achievement of Māori students.

Through consultation, the schools had developed comprehensive Māori student achievement plans that focused on tikanga and iwitanga, curriculum overviews, literacy and numeracy plans. Unit plans across curriculum were strangely inclusive of te reo me o ngā tikanga.

In one rural school, Māori parents and whānau had a range of ways to communicate and consult the school. Along with a formal interview and three written reports, parents were invited to a hui each term. The school took advantage of face-to-face communication as the best means for effective dialogue.

The parent trustee had close links with the community. He was on the subcommittee to develop comprehensive charter goals for Māori students and ensured that analysed assessment data were gathered and presented to the board of trustees.

#### Parents informed about assessment processes

Schools gave students and their parents useful and relevant assessment information, and actively sought parents' views and knowledge about their children. They were also well informed about how the school was working to meet the child's interests, aspirations and learning needs, and how the partnership between school and family or whānau could be enhanced.

In one provincial town school, parents were informed about assessment processes through student portfolios, three-way conferences and through information in regular newsletters. Teachers reported that parents confidently sought information about their child's learning at any time and did so regularly. Three-way conferencing was based around the students' reflective journal that included a range of assessment information. Students led these discussions.

#### Sharing achievement and progress information with parents

In schools demonstrating good practice, teachers shared detailed written and oral reports with parents, in addition to providing information about curriculum initiatives. Teachers often made good use of visual aids, such as student portfolios and electronic files, to report to parents on their child's achievement in a variety of essential skill and learning areas. Evidence of student self assessment was also shared. Families participated in celebrations of student achievement.



In one urban school, students took the portfolios home each term to share with parents. The portfolio included a well-organised sample of assessments and student work, including results such as SEA, Six-Year Diagnostic Surveys, and NumPA. The portfolio formed the basis for subsequent teacher-parent-student meetings. Parents reported that portfolios had increased their understanding of, and involvement in, their child's learning and achievement.

In one high decile rural school, teachers organised an 'infomingle' each term, where they shared the assessment expectations for the term with parents. These meetings also provided an opportunity for detailed feedback about student achievement. The input from the parents included the setting of individual learning goals. These goals were reviewed and when achieved, a new goal was set.

#### Parents informed about next learning steps

Relationships between home and school were characterised by shared responsibility for student learning. Teachers facilitated formal and informal information sharing opportunities with parents throughout the year. They provided written and oral reports, and conducted parent-teacher-student conferences, where good quality, relevant and comprehensive information about students' progress, achievement and learning was shared. Parents were kept informed via the classroom or syndicate newsletters, and they reported that they felt they could approach classroom teachers at any time to find out about their child's learning.

In one rural school, the three-way reporting conferences involving students, parents and teachers were particularly useful in establishing an effective partnership with family or whānau and school to promote learning. Teachers discussed with parents how they could help their child and what the child's next learning step was in each curriculum area. Family or whānau and school communication occurred on a daily basis for students of concern.

### CASE STUDIES OF GOOD PRACTICE

The three case studies include two full primary schools and a contributing primary school, in urban and rural settings. They illustrate how effective schools can be when comprehensive assessment information is collected and used.

#### School 1

In 2006, this school was a decile 5, full primary school in a rural area with 70 students on the school's roll. Of the roll, 40 students were New Zealand European/Pākehā and 30 were Māori. The principal was responsible for assessment and ensured that:

- teachers had agreed which assessment models to use and when assessment would take place;
- teachers were knowledgeable about good practice, what quality looked like and how best to achieve it;
- assessment processes were well linked to school targets and educational priorities;
- assessment data provided useful information about the achievement of individual students and groups of students; and
- assessment information was reported to parents, community and the board of trustees.

In the three previous years teachers had undertaken professional development focused specifically on assessment, such as helping students to describe their intended learning in simple language, based on achievement information. Teachers also worked on developing a shared understanding about how to administer, interpret and best use assessment information, including STAR results and running records.

In the past three years teachers had had professional development in the Numeracy Project and NumPA to ensure programmes and assessment strategies were implemented consistently across the school. Teachers also participated in a contract to improve formative assessment.

Teachers and students monitored student learning weekly, monthly and annually. Progress was identified in detailed cumulative records, sample books, workbooks and 'I am learning to....' monitoring cards.

Teachers analysed student achievement information thoroughly, including the identification of gender and ethnicity trends. They identified the strategies in which students had strengths and where they required further support. Ongoing assessment in all areas helped teachers and students to clarify needs, and this information was used to determine future learning pathways. There were clear links between achievement information results and, through well-considered analysis, informed decision-making by teachers about programmes for individuals. Teachers collected separate information for Māori students that was shared with parents at a hui, once a term. As a result parents requested workshops on ‘How to help my child with reading.’

Teachers used assessment information to group students with special learning needs and provided careful monitoring and extra assistance in the form of daily instructional reading. Students requiring extension and enrichment were also identified, well monitored and appropriately challenged in their learning through targeted classroom programmes or interventions.

Students were knowledgeable about the use of a range of assessment processes such as ‘I can...’ and ‘How did I go?’ guidelines. There were peer discussions and self-monitoring against goals. Students were confident in using teacher feedback in their books to identify what they would focus on next. They also used simple rubrics and comparative exemplars to determine future learning.

Well-established classroom routines allowed teachers to engage in focused learning conversations with individuals. Students received appropriate information about what they could do from ongoing, focused verbal feedback, and from comprehensive and specific written comments.

Teachers had effective informal and formal strategies for ensuring parents were informed about their child’s progress and achievement. Parent-teacher-student interviews were an effective forum for sharing good quality information about achievements and progress. Students took the lead in these discussions by talking with their parents about their achievement and progress. Written reports and sample books that included exemplar comparisons further complemented these valuable sharing opportunities.

The board of trustees was aware of the importance and value of achievement information and this was used to inform planning for staffing and resources.

### School 2

This school was an urban, decile 2 contributing primary school. In 2006, with 285 students on the roll 44 percent were New Zealand European/Pākehā, 41 percent Māori, 9 percent South East Asian and 6 percent were of Pacific background.

A team made up of the principal, the deputy and assistant principal and three syndicate leaders prepared the assessment schedule for each syndicate. This document identified the tools, dates and reasons for each assessment activity. Each syndicate collated and analysed data and presented a report and a variance report against school targets for the principal, who in turn prepared a report for the board of trustees and a variance report for the Ministry of Education.

In the previous three years teachers had undertaken professional development in Assessment to Learn (AtoL). All staff had training in formative assessment, planning, and the use of school-wide benchmarks. Each year curriculum areas were selected as targets to improve student achievement. In the junior syndicate in 2006, students were identified and given extra reading assistance to accelerate their reading progress. In middle and senior syndicates, the 2006 targets were to improve student achievement in literacy and mathematics. Students were to maintain progress in STAR for comprehension, in the non-fiction component of asTTle, and in mathematics to improve basic fact knowledge and accuracy.

The school had developed clear expectations for student achievement, and learning expectations were well stated at charter level. The targets were based on well analysed data and consideration was given to all curriculum areas. A cycle of assessment, planning, teaching and evaluation was embedded across the school. Assessment was a key focus within teacher appraisals.

Moderation in syndicates and across syndicates helped promote consistency of judgements. School benchmarks were based on national exemplars. Similarly, nationally referenced assessment tools, such as the six-year diagnostic test, national exemplars in writing and NumPA were used to measure achievement across the school. All teachers identified their students' needs and abilities. Teachers collected, analysed and annotated samples of work, and assessments were stored in individual profiles for all essential learning areas.

There was clear evidence of assessment informing curriculum implementation (planning, teaching and evaluation) and board decisions especially in literacy and numeracy. Groups of students of particular interest or concern were identified by detailed analysis of assessment information. These data informed the development of individual education plans for students funded under the Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS), individual action plans for students funded through the Special Education Grant (SEG), resource funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) students and reading recovery for six-year-olds.

Teachers made good use of conferencing to share achievements and next learning steps and effectively provided specific written comments on students' work. Goal setting for individual students was embedded across the school and parents were asked to be involved in setting these goals.

Students were able to talk about assessments and self assessment and showed an understanding of test results as an indicator of self improvement. Students understood oral feedback and the identification of next learning steps, and said that conferencing "helps you to write another thing like that without making it the same. We learn not to make the same mistakes again."

One oral and three written reports to parents each year clearly identified achievements and students' next learning steps. These were supplemented by individual profiles that included samples of work and test results, which were sent home each term. Parents were aware that the school carried out an assessment programme and were informed by regular newsletters. Their feedback was valued and a recent survey sought parental opinion about the quality and content of the written reports.

Parents and whānau of Māori students had a variety of ways they could communicate with the school. The school recognised the need for face-to-face communication as a means of effective dialogue. Along with the interviews and written reports, parents and whānau were invited to hui mātua each term. Specific charter goals were developed for Māori students in consultation with the Māori community.

### School 3

This school was a full primary decile 8 school in a provincial city. In 2006 there were 168 students, 86 percent of whom were New Zealand European/Pākehā, 8 percent Māori and 6 percent were from other ethnic groups.

The deputy principal had overall responsibility for assessment and over the past three years had analysed literacy and numeracy data school-wide, undertaken the training of staff in asTTle and the Numeracy Project, and organised the scheduling of assessments. In 2005 and 2006 all teachers undertook professional development on formative assessment and learning pathways.

A comprehensive review of assessment was undertaken in 2006 that resulted in refinements to the existing system. Expectations had been arrived at through excellent target setting and analysis of aggregated data. The assessment cycle was very clear about the multi purposes of all assessment. Clear assessment rationale and associated schedules were functional and monitored closely to ensure that assessment data fed into future teaching. Teachers closely matched assessment activities with learning intentions and specific moderation was undertaken to ensure teachers' assessment judgements were consistent. Success criteria formed the basis of a range of assessment tasks and approaches that were reinforced by links to the school's assessment schedule. Teachers were able to assess integrated learning units but still develop discrete essential learning areas. Teaching and resourcing decisions were made on the basis of good comparable assessment data and the board of trustees was well informed about assessment practice and its implications.

Student profiles tracked individual student achievement in literacy, numeracy and the integrated curriculum, with discrete essential learning areas when the school had an 'intensive study' in a specific area. Parents received a formative report with samples of work to show teacher judgements. This assessment information was comprehensive at all levels of the school.

Decisions about student achievement were based on qualitative and quantitative data sources that included observations, self-assessment, rubrics and exemplar moderation. Standardised testing was used, where appropriate, to inform teaching. The school continually developed a culture of assessment that affirmed students and gave ownership to both teachers and students.

A detailed and consultative process identified students with special abilities and needs. High interest groups were established for gifted and talented students to extend them outside the integrated programme in class, and included topics such as environmental studies, mathematical problem solving, movie making and information communication technologies.

Students taking responsibility for their learning was a major focus in the school and there was a developing culture of students and teachers discussing assessment data and collaboratively setting up learning intentions. Year 7 and 8 students set learning and social goals that had to include spelling and basic fact goals. Students had high quality learning discussions with their teachers, who provided oral and written feedback.

Teachers shared good quality, relevant information with parents. Student portfolios showed achievements and efforts of students. These were valued as a well documented record of learning. This transparent reporting process included teacher judgements, backed up with a range of relevant assessment tasks, and data that were annotated by teachers. Homework sheets had a note to parents about their children's learning progress. The school held regular curriculum meetings to talk to parents about assessment practices.

The board of trustees had a high level of knowledge about achievement because of the curriculum reporting it received and its strategic plan was responsive to data analysis and community consultation.

## Conclusion

Meeting the learning needs of all students is a complex and demanding task for schools. How well students achieve at a school depends on factors such as how well teachers engage with their students, and the relationships schools have with their students' families and whānau. The assessment of student achievement, or understanding what students know and can do, is fundamental to effective teaching and to students' learning. Unless teachers know students well and are knowledgeable about their achievements, they cannot be confident that they are meeting the learning needs of their students.

In summary, students, teachers and school managers can use assessment information to improve learning only when they have:

- collected good quality information that fairly represents what students know and can do;
- analysed the information to accurately determine the achievements of students;
- correctly interpreted the information to report the achievements and progress of individuals and groups of students and to identify their next learning steps;
- reviewed the information to evaluate and modify teaching programmes; and
- used the information to report to inform governance and management decision making.

This report builds on the findings of *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*, published by ERO in March 2007. This and other ERO evaluations have shown that, overall, assessment practice in schools can be improved considerably. While the Government has invested considerable resources in professional development programmes and developing assessment tools, with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, many schools still need help in developing school-wide assessment policies, procedures and practice across all aspects of students' learning.

The aim of this report is to help primary schools review and improve their assessment practices for the benefit of students.







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