

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

June 2007



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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 secondary 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 Education Review Office report *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*¹, published in March 2007.

This complementary report aims to help secondary schools review their assessment practice. The report gives examples of how five secondary schools use assessment information to provide good learning opportunities for their students. It provides further examples from secondary schools with high quality assessment collection practices.

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.’² 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 their teaching is supporting students to achieve their potential. ‘Overall the purpose of assessment is to improve standards, not merely to measure them.’³

Effective assessment systems help schools to monitor students’ progress and achievement, and enable them to design effective programmes. It is not a case of schools assessing more, but of using assessment information in a more planned and thoughtful manner.

Each secondary school in this study developed its processes for the collection and use of assessment information in ways that responded well to their students’ needs and interests.

In the junior school (Years 9 and 10) teachers in this study used a range of strategies, including national exemplars, to monitor student progress and achievement. However, in seeking examples of good practice for this report ERO found that, in general, assessment practice for Years 9 and 10 was not strong. Teachers often used assessment systems derived from NCEA and described achievement on a four-point scale: not achieved, achieved, merit, and excellence. This approach in a class or whole cohort where all students are being taught at the one curriculum level can result in some students spending two years identified as ‘not achieved’. This does not reflect principles of personalising learning, or the design and intention of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

- 1 Education Review Office. www.ero.govt.nz
- 2 Harlen, Gipps, Broadfoot, Nuttal, “Assessment and the Improvement of Education”, *The Curriculum Journal* 3(3) (1992): pp 214–229.
- 3 OFSTED. *Review of Secondary Education in England, 1993-97*. 1998. Section 5.6.

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In the senior school, teachers assessed students in each subject against national standards that contribute to the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA). Standards were assessed using either internal or external assessment. The schools in this study displayed common characteristics that contributed to the high quality of the collection and use of assessment information.

Schools that demonstrated good practice:

- made certain that teachers had a shared understanding about the purpose of assessment;
- expected teachers to be knowledgeable about their students' achievements and interests;
- 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;
- encouraged their teachers to use data effectively to improve their teaching;
- expected assessment information to be drawn from a wide range of sources: day to day interactions with students; analysis of students' work and from more formally designed and administered assessment tasks;
- made sure teachers were able to analyse both numeric and narrative assessment information and interpret the results so they 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 that 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 school-wide data on their achievements;
- identified trends and patterns in students' achievements and compared the achievements of groups of students within the school;
- established clear expectations for achievement and assessment, including making collation and reporting easier so comparisons could be made to agreed achievement targets;
- promoted the philosophy that student learning drove assessment practices, not credit acquisition;
- established clear lines of communication and easily accessed support between school and home; and
- provided students and their parents with booklets and held information evenings to explain the NQF requirements and assessment procedures, including appeals and opportunities for reassessment.

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

The evaluation of the quality of the collection and use of assessment information in 314 schools occurred in Terms 1 and 2, 2006 and the findings of this evaluation were reported in *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*, published by ERO in March 2007. As part of the major evaluation ERO reviewed the quality of assessment information in 61 secondary schools.

In these secondary schools:

- 36 percent had developed and implemented an effective integrated school-wide approach to assessment processes and information;
- 62 percent had achievement information that demonstrated students' achievements and progress;
- 42 percent demonstrated effective interaction of assessment with teaching and learning;
- 31 percent of students used information about their achievement effectively for further learning;
- 46 percent were establishing and using school-wide information to improve student achievement; and
- 47 percent were effective in reporting information about students' achievements to the community.

The evaluation was based on six questions about schools' collection and use of assessment information. ERO found the schools' effectiveness across these six evaluation areas varied considerably, with about half the schools demonstrating effective assessment practices overall.

The percentages for secondary schools were lower than that of primary schools, because the assessment information gathered by teachers in many secondary schools did not give comprehensive information on students' achievement in Years 9 or 10. Teachers were better informed about the achievement of students in Years 11 to 13, although in many cases the information gathered for these students did not give an accurate picture of their progress over time.

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. Students need to be fully involved in their learning and to know how well they are progressing and achieving. Where assessment is used effectively, teachers monitor their own teaching and are fully informed about how well students are learning.

Methodology

EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

The following evaluation questions provided the framework for the ERO reports: *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* and *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information: Good Practice in Secondary 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 five schools of a variety of roll sizes and deciles located across New Zealand. They included coeducational, single sex and integrated schools. These schools were able to demonstrate effective practice in the collection and use of assessment information.

School 1

This was a decile 4, coeducational secondary school in an urban area.

In 2006 there were 932 students on the school's roll, of whom 44 percent were New Zealand European/Pākehā, 40 percent Māori, 13 percent Pacific and 3 percent Asian.

The board of trustees demonstrated a good understanding of governance and clear expectations were set for receiving information on student achievement, to inform board decisions and set future directions.

Teachers analysed and evaluated assessment information to improve students' learning. The information was used effectively to identify school-wide trends and patterns of achievement for individuals and groups of students. Comprehensive moderation processes across all levels of the school enhanced the quality of the data gathered.

In May and November each year, teachers assessed Years 9, 10 and 11 students in reading comprehension with the use of Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle).

Teachers were 'assessment literate'. In the previous three years teachers had undertaken professional development in Assess to Learn (AtoL) and asTTle, and commented that being markers for external assessment for National Certificates in Educational Achievement (NCEA) had particularly helped build their assessment knowledge.

School 2

This was a decile 1, coeducational, multicultural, urban secondary school.

In 2006 there were 1440 students, of whom 36 percent were Samoan, 16 percent Tongan, 12 percent Māori, 9 percent Cook Island Māori, 8 percent Indian, 6 percent Niuean, 4 percent New Zealand European/Pākehā and 9 percent other ethnicities.

The school's involvement in the initiative, Achievement in Multicultural High Schools (AIMHI), provided support for the board and staff to improve literacy and numeracy strategies in the junior school, and achievement at Level 1 of NCEA. Heads of departments analysed NCEA data comprehensively, so teachers could plan programmes that were relevant to students' learning needs. Teachers analysed asTTle reading data for Year 9 students to guide class placement and to identify students who required additional learning support.

At the senior level, teachers collated and analysed assessment data thoroughly. The board offered a diverse range of courses to enable students to gain credits towards national certificates and qualifications.

An external consultant provided ongoing support for heads of department to review department documentation and the quality of planning. This support helped staff to develop and implement consistent planning, assessment and evaluation processes across departments.

In the previous three years teachers had undertaken professional development by attending NCEA training days run by New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) personnel and departmental specialists, AIMHI workshops in internal and external assessment practices and staff meetings with an assessment focus.

These strategies increased teachers' knowledge of their students' abilities and how to integrate assessment practice with teaching and learning.

School 3

This was a decile 6, state integrated boys' school (Years 7 to 13) in an urban area.

In 2006 there were 850 students on the roll. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 52 percent, Samoan 14 percent, Māori 10 percent, South East Asian 9 percent, Tongan and Indian 3 percent each, Chinese 2 percent, Cook Island Māori Niuean, Fijian, South African 1 percent each, other ethnicities 3 percent.

A senior management team was in charge of assessment, made up of the academic advisor, the head of mathematics, two deputy principals and the principal. They recognised that using high quality achievement and assessment information would improve students' learning.

Moderation of departmental assessment was rigorous. Senior management and subject leaders devised a procedure to make sure that the moderation of Years 7 to 13 students' assessments was timetabled and completed. Departments met regularly to moderate common tests and assignments. The moderation process was discussed fully among staff members at department meetings to ensure consistency across classes and teachers.

In the previous three years, teachers had undertaken professional development in Gifted and Talented education and assessment, AtoL, asTTle, the Achievement @Waitakere (A@W) initiative to address underachievement of Māori and Pacific students, and NCEA workshops.

School 4

This was a decile 7, coeducational (Years 9 to 13) school, located in a provincial town.

In 2006 there were 554 students on the roll. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 86 percent, Māori 12 percent, Asian 1 percent and 1 percent identifying as other ethnicities.

Teachers made good use of assessment information to improve students' learning. Data from students' primary schools were used to help plan their secondary programme. Teachers used assessment data to inform their planning, modify programmes, and report to parents and the board of trustees on student progress and achievement. Students' learning needs were identified and progress was tracked for individuals, groups and classes. Good practice was seen where teachers used national test results to share information with other teachers and to inform school-wide achievement targets.

School 5

This school was a decile 9, state integrated school for girls (Years 7 to 13), and located in a provincial town.

In 2006 the roll was 340. The ethnic composition was New Zealand European/Pākehā 89 percent; Asian 5 percent; Māori 4 percent; Pacific 1 percent and 1 percent other ethnicity.

Teachers used students' achievement and assessment information to improve learning and report on progress. They provided opportunities for formal and informal assessments that guided students in achieving national standards in the senior school. In Years 7 to 10, diagnostic achievement data gave teachers information about the literacy and numeracy skills of their students. Teachers used the curriculum achievement objectives in several learning areas to write units of work and create their own standards-based assessments. Moderation of common assessment tasks occurred in departments, with other schools and in some cases, incorporated the advice of local advisors. The school had developed common procedures for assessment that provided students with feedback on their progress.

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 of this report 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 of assessment 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. Specific examples are also identified.

SCHOOL-WIDE APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT PRACTICES 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 schoolwide, all teachers need to develop an agreed understanding about the purposes of assessment and about appropriate learning and achievement expectations for their students.

In evaluating how effectively secondary 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 systems across the school; and
- implemented processes to strengthen assessment consistency and judgements.

The following sections highlight, through discussion and case studies, key aspects of good practice in secondary school assessment.

School-wide expectations and guidelines

Secondary schools demonstrating good practice had clear guidelines and school-wide agreement about assessment practices across learning programmes. They had developed and used existing 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 tools such as achievement and unit standard 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 the next steps in school, teacher, or programme development as required.

The board of trustees developed high-quality strategic plans that linked to detailed school-wide guidelines about the purpose of assessment. The board articulated its commitment to excellent teaching and academic success, and was supported by a clear direction for implementation of all operational areas that had an impact on student achievement. Specific data-based goals defined actions, responsibilities and performance indicators that provided a sound basis for monitoring progress. Student achievement targets focused on establishing school-wide literacy programmes to raise the academic achievement of students.

Strong curriculum management systems supported the school-wide development of good quality assessment. Assessment expectations were well documented and ensured consistency across all curriculum areas. There were robust internal and external moderation processes. Internal audit of departments and subjects conducted in the years that the NZQA did not conduct a Managing National Assessment review, ensured that assessment policies were followed consistently. The school used external moderation not only to gauge school progress against national means, but to provide rigour to critique the development of new internal curriculum programmes. This resulted in the development of alternative programmes that best met the diverse learning needs of students.

Assessment linked to learning priorities

Effective guidance, such as that provided by well-structured planning and assessment systems, helped teachers to link assessment information directly to the identified learning priorities for each student. These explicit connections were a strong feature at all levels in the schools and were well established in all curriculum areas.

Teachers worked together to develop school-wide expectations and goals for students, based on aggregated and analysed student achievement data. The expectations and learning priorities were meaningful and specific. They focused on educationally significant learning, and the priorities were challenging enough to raise student achievement.

The school had developed meaningful strategic targets for its school charter that clarified the learning priorities for students. Achievement levels in literacy and numeracy were clearly linked to developments such as the AtoL project. Professional development had an emphasis on aligning assessment to learning intentions.

Teachers regularly assessed student achievement. They used this information to determine student placement in flexible groupings within classrooms, to ensure learning needs were met in Years 7 to 10 and to guide course planning and programme implementation in the senior school. It provided a basis for reporting student progress to parents and the board of trustees and also guided decisions about resourcing. Results from Years 7 to 10 students and NCEA students were used as the basis for determining the long-term and systematic progress of students' achievement.

Clear rationale and appropriate systems

The schools in this study 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. The schools had clearly 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, and 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. The development of such 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 also used this information 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.

The assessment policy was written to guide teachers' assessment processes. It contained useful strategies for monitoring and providing clear pictures of progress for each student and for groups of students school wide. The assessment manual included the principles of good assessment practices, school expectations, moderation guidelines and regular review and evaluation of procedures. Teachers consistently managed and moderated student assessment.

They related their assessment processes to curriculum levels and to progress within levels.

Staff professional development in the use of asTTle was ongoing, and supported departments and teachers in accessing and using comprehensive information about the literacy and numeracy levels of their students. Teachers of senior classes collated NCEA data for individual students to help them make more informed choices about course selection.

Processes to strengthen consistency and judgements

Effective schools developed and implemented systems for ensuring consistency of judgements between teachers. In these schools, key staff members said, that although establishing effective moderation processes for assessment tasks was a time consuming activity, the positive benefits were evident. The professional discussions required to arrive at consensus clarified the rationale for assessment in these schools, and the increase in teachers' knowledge of their students' abilities led to a deeper understanding of the curriculum area, and how well their students were learning.

The schools operated ongoing review processes. Teachers were engaged in high levels of professional dialogue about assessment consistency and judgements. They introduced moderation by using exemplars and by sharing portfolio entries. Teachers were involved in professional development in literacy and numeracy assessment.

The senior management team developed a curriculum leaders' handbook. Curriculum teams were continually reviewing their documentation and procedures to strengthen the consistency and judgements at each level across the seven curriculum areas. Teachers used computerised assessment records to collect student achievement information. Strong moderation procedures were evident as teachers moderated work among themselves and also sought opinions of teachers from other schools and advisors. Summative data were collected to show progress over time. Teachers collected formative assessment data and used the data to set planning targets. Years 7 to 9 students completed pre- and post-testing across curriculum and year levels.

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 the schools have developed their 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 gave a clear, comprehensive picture of student achievement across the curriculum.

A feature of these schools was the effort teachers made to create strong partnerships with students, and actively involve them in outlining their intended learning in straightforward language. As a consequence clear and appropriate goals guided the learning process.

The mathematics department had well-planned and timetabled assessment procedures. Teachers moderated student work with their peers, and results were shared to ensure consistency. Teachers conferred with students and strategies were put in place to either extend or provide targeted support. This was monitored and changes made to the programme if required. Teachers used a wide range of national and local tests including NCEA, asTTle, and tests developed by the department. Assessment was the focus in the senior school. Years 9 and 10 teachers focused on skill and knowledge development, with assessment integrated within teaching and learning processes.

Reference to national and local sources of achievement information

In schools demonstrating 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 teachers, and parent and whānau observations were complemented by more formal assessments including testing and conferencing with individual students.

Schools had a large bank of assessments tools available in hard copy and electronic form, so teachers could choose appropriately 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:

- Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading (STAR);
- Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle);
- systematic teacher observation reports and teachers' knowledge about their students;
- formative assessment through the Assess to Learn (AtoL) project; and
- National Certificates in Educational Achievement (NCEA) data, analysed at school-wide and department levels.

Teachers collected baseline and subsequent achievement information for literacy in Years 9 to 11, through the use of asTTle. Students were assessed in reading comprehension in May and November each year. The assessment information was used for individual diagnostic information and as an indicator of individual and group progress. Teachers used the information to show achievement trends and patterns within the school. Significant progress over three years could be shown for these year levels. As a consequence, students were in a much better position than previously to learn and succeed.

Professional development in the use of assessment was firmly established. Teachers were given professional development in formative assessment, using external support, internal expertise, focused workshops and staff sharing of ideas through ‘bring and brag’ sessions. One focus on formative assessment was through the introduction of the AtoL project. Teachers’ professional learning was supported by coaching, in-class observations, peer dialogue, faculty discussions, and targeted support. This led to a shared understanding of the use of assessment and observable changes in teacher assessment practices.

THE INTERACTION OF ASSESSMENT WITH TEACHING AND LEARNING

Assessment, teaching and learning are interdependent. Teaching activities should not be separate from 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 interaction of assessment with teaching and learning using 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. They gathered both formative and summative achievement data in many different ways and from a variety of assessment tools, tests, observations, and conversations. Teachers could analyse this information to develop a useful picture of the progress of individuals and groups of students. Teachers were skilled at using this analysis to plan teaching and learning programmes.

The interaction 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, including the provision of studying at different levels for NCEA. Students received well-targeted learning experiences that were suitably challenging and achievable.

Expectations for learning were clearly stated. Assessments were linked to these expected learning outcomes, and reflections on teaching practice were identified in programme planning and evaluations. Students were given ongoing targeted oral and written feedback from teachers, which focused on these priorities. Teachers used this information to identify goals and next steps in learning.

Systems to support the management of assessment for the NQF school wide were established. Students were kept well informed of the policies and procedures for assessment, of the requirements at each level and the schools' prerequisites for entry to higher level courses. Teachers tailored NCEA programmes to students' needs. Teachers modified teaching programmes in response to assessment results by offering alternative mixed courses of unit and achievement standards in some curriculum areas. In addition, teachers proactively designed courses to help all students achieve NCEA Level 1.

Decisions about learning experiences and programmes

Assessment formed the basis for planning and teaching. Sound practices 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;
- involving students in developing clear statements that outlined the intended learning, in straightforward language;

- establishing individual goals with 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.

Systems and structures were developed to support the planning and provision of programmes included:

- professional development in differentiated, personalised learning within classrooms and formative assessment, using external support, internal expertise and focused workshops;
- team teaching for three classes at Years 9 and 10 where subject specialists and teachers with expertise in literacy provided extra support for students to meet the learning intention of the lesson;
- offering courses in the senior school that were adjusted to provide specific programmes at different levels, which were assessed accordingly; and
- providing vocational courses for students to prepare them for future employment opportunities.

Learning needs of individual and groups of students

Analysis of data from a range of sources identified where additional support or extension was needed. Teachers used information obtained in individual conferencing to identify where students needed to improve and to determine the next learning steps. Standardised tests, teachers' own judgements, and comparisons with exemplars were used in making assessment decisions. Each year information from students' previous teachers contributed to overall knowledge about individual students. Teachers conducted NCEA analysis throughout the school and by department so they could plan programmes that were relevant to students' learning needs.

Comprehensive guidance for conducting assessment was provided in the NQF policy and procedures documents. Teachers analysed and evaluated assessment information to identify trends and patterns of achievement for individual and groups of students across the school, and to determine the extent to which specific annual targets were met. Moderation of teachers' judgements for internally assessed unit and

achievement standards was well organised and monitored by the principal's NZQA liaison nominee. National moderation reports were carefully followed up with departments to discuss responses and actions to be taken to ensure the understanding, and ongoing consistency, of teachers' judgments with national standards.

Standards-based assessment was fully integrated into teaching and learning. Teachers used junior learning standards, referenced to achievement objectives taken from national curriculum statements, to assess student outcomes in all Years 9 and 10 classes. NCEA was the focus for senior school achievement. As a result, there was a seamless approach to assessment across the school.

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 effectively students were using 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 goal.
- Students received appropriate information on what they could do and their next learning steps.

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

Student involvement in learning

Students said they received useful assessment information and were well informed about their current achievement levels, and what they needed to focus on next. Teachers and students discussed how work would be assessed and the purpose 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 articulated.

Teachers explained to students the purpose of the assessment activities through the sharing of learning intentions and success criteria. Teachers ensured that assessment tasks were closely aligned to the learning intentions. They undertook sampling and moderation of assessment tasks to ensure consistency of data. Students' learning was enhanced through frequent and meaningful oral feedback. Teachers encouraged students to analyse and interpret their assessment information and to evaluate their progress. Assessment processes were clearly understood by students.

Teachers 'conferenced' with students if they were not achieving and offered extra support in the areas they needed to improve. English teachers taught mathematics staff to use literacy results to monitor students' progress, as there was a distinct correlation between underachievement in mathematics and low literacy scores. Other subject teachers were working with these students to lift literacy levels in anticipation that numeracy levels would also increase.

Teaching and learning practices focused on the partnership with students through the use of effective assessment systems. These included:

- students reflecting on their learning and identifying their next learning steps;
- students keeping records of their assessments and using this information in conferencing with teachers;
- teachers guiding students on how to improve their performance in assessment tasks;
- teachers adapting units of work to provide for students' interests, needs and abilities in response to student feedback/discussion; and
- students taking part in self and peer assessment.

Teachers provided students in these classes with opportunities to develop skills and knowledge that would encourage them to succeed.

Students' goal setting

Student involvement in personal goal setting was a well established, school-wide practice. Staff developed their understanding and use of formative feedback to aid this. Staff and students said this heightened focus on achievement was a valued 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' specific goals. Students showed a growing awareness of the benefit of their own learning, and became more engaged in learning processes.

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

The assessment processes were fully explained to senior students. They interpreted the information to extend their learning and understood what they needed to do to gain excellence, merit or achieved. Teachers encouraged senior students to keep tracking sheets and be responsible for monitoring the number of credits they accumulated. Junior students understood the assessment process and what their next steps were.

Students developed their own curriculum and personal goals and were able to relate these to their learning. They responded positively to the chance to monitor their own progress and articulated their own learning intentions.

Students were able to demonstrate their learning and achievement through a good range of planned assessment activities. These included written tests, practical activities, performances, assignments and tasks, oral and visual presentations, portfolios of work, and group assessments.

THE 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. Such information provides school managers and trustees with evidence of how well the school is meeting the learning needs of all students.

ERO evaluated how effectively school-wide information was 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' achievements was used to gauge and monitor the effectiveness of teaching and programmes.
- Information on students' achievements was used to identify and monitor groups of students who may have been of interest or concern.
- Trustees used information about students' achievements to inform policy, strategic planning and resourcing.

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

School-wide collation, analysis and use of assessment data

Schools, boards of trustees, senior management teams, and teachers had a strong focus on the collation, analysis and use of achievement information to improve future learning.

Strategies to focus teachers on effective assessment practice included:

- teachers having access to professional development to support them in using data on literacy to raise student achievement across the curriculum;
- asTTLe data, including information from some contributing schools, enabling teachers to develop programmes and appropriately place students in classes and groups; and
- ongoing assessment, using a variety of national tools, allowing teachers to monitor student progress and achievement.

Detailed analysis of data about students' performance in NCEA made comparisons with national results and evaluated trends and patterns over time. Teachers used this information to inform whole-school strategic development, and curriculum and programme planning. Faculties/departments also analysed results within their curriculum and used this information in their annual reports, and in review discussions with the principal.

The school assessment committee reviewed items for action in the *Managing National Assessment* report, by NZQA. Amendments were made and a sound policy and procedural framework guided assessment practices in the school. Appropriate systems operated at all levels and students were aware of requirements.

Targets over the previous three years focused on establishing a literacy programme to raise the academic achievement of students. The school's progress within the literacy initiative showed consistent improvement from 2003 to 2005. There was sustained improvement in NCEA results in Levels 1 to 3 over time. This indicated that targeted professional development in literacy had a positive impact on student achievement. Good systems guided standards-based assessment in Years 7 to 10. STAR and asTTLe results indicated that most students were achieving at or above national expectations in literacy and numeracy.

Use of data to gauge and monitor teaching and programmes

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

A comprehensive and rigorous audit of each faculty or department was undertaken triennially. This included the evaluation of student progress and achievement, documentation, implementation of programmes and assessment practices. Information was gathered through lesson observations, student surveys and teacher interviews. The audit included an assessment moderator's report. In some curriculum areas where specialist expertise was required, external auditors were included in the team. Recommendations were formulated to guide further faculty planning and development of assessment. Senior managers conducted additional reviews as required to monitor initiatives such as professional learning and assessment. These reviews involved sampling of assessment data, observations and surveys of teachers and students.

Information used to identify and monitor students of interest or concern

The schools used school wide and classroom specific information to identify students with particular educational strengths and needs. Individual Education Plans 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 individual programmes, supported students who were experiencing difficulty. Students who were achieving or had the potential to achieve at a level beyond their peer group were also provided with extension programmes. These students were also monitored regularly.

Professional development had focused on establishing a literacy programme to raise the academic achievement of students. The school's progress in a local literacy initiative showed consistent improvement over three years. There was sustained improvement in NCEA results in Levels 1 to 3. This indicated that targeted professional development in literacy had had a positive impact on student achievement.

The school's assessment team included an academic advisor. She met with all students in Years 12 and 13 to negotiate academic pathways to ensure that students had ongoing success, and students also had the option to change pathways in the future by academic results or career choice. The students and their parents said they valued the discussions and were pleased to have both choice and success at school.

The school had developed systems and structures to support the planning and provision of programmes to identify and monitor students of interest or concern. This included each teacher identifying a group of students at Years 9 and 10, including Māori and Pacific students, to gather information about their learning behaviours, attitudes and levels of achievement. This enabled teachers to focus and monitor appropriate support more accurately.

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 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 development remained on student achievement by making explicit links between available information and strategic planning, and identifying processes to support these priorities.

Self review by the board of trustees was clearly linked to student achievement. For example, the board of trustees used an evidence-based approach to review annual goals and targets. A detailed analysis of variance provided a sound basis for identifying progress, gaps and formulating future goals. Analysis of NCEA data was helpful to the board in its decision-making.

The board of trustees and principal demonstrated a strong commitment to enhancing student achievement through improved literacy teaching strategies. This was the central focus of the strategic plan to raise the academic achievement of students. This priority was well articulated by teachers throughout the school. The strong literacy focus at the strategic level was linked to department goals and teachers' appraisal goals.

REPORTING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT INFORMATION TO THE COMMUNITY

Students' learning and achievements do not happen only 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 of student-school-community occurs when all parties are fully informed about achievements and progress.

The National Administration Guidelines⁴ state that each board of trustees, with the principal and teaching staff, is required to:

...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/whānau were consulted to develop and make known targets 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 the schools have developed their 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 purposeful and meaningful consultation with parents about assessment processes and how they received information about their children. Parents were aware of why assessment activities were conducted and what the results meant for their children.

Consultation was an integral part of the process to redesign the format and timing of school reports. The school valued the parental view that the reports needed to meet their needs.

⁴ Ministry of Education, *The National Administration Guidelines (NAG) 2*, iii. Wellington: Ministry of Education, revised 2006.

Māori community/whānau consulted

Robust processes were used 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 determine the views of the Māori whānau and the community.

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

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

The achievement of Māori students was a school priority. The board used the regular reports about student achievement to review and inform its targets and goals. The principal took a personal interest in the achievement of Māori students and checked that individual support and guidance was available for those students who needed it. The curriculum reports required heads of department to consider how teachers might best meet the learning needs of Māori students. At the classroom level, teachers identified and closely monitored the achievement of Māori students.

Parents informed about assessment processes

Schools gave students and their parents useful and relevant information about the assessment processes they used. Students and parents understood how the school was working to meet the child's interests, aspirations and learning needs. The partnership between family, whānau and school was enhanced through common understanding about the school's assessment processes.

Reports included comprehensive information about how to interpret the information provided. Information sessions or evenings were held for parents to explain grade point average and standards-based assessment.

Teachers provided parents with detailed information about NCEA and NQF and course assessment requirements.

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.

Specific provision was made to help students and their parents understand assessment for NCEA. Booklets and course outlines in hard copy and on the school's intranet, together with newsletters and information evenings, explained NQF requirements and assessment procedures. This included appeals and opportunities for reassessment advice.

Portfolios of work samples for students in Years 9 and 10 contained evidence to support teacher judgements about student achievement, and to provide an effective basis for discussing progress with parents and students.

Parents informed about next learning steps

Teachers facilitated formal and informal information sharing opportunities with parents throughout the year. Teachers 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 often informed via regular newsletters and they said that they felt they could approach teachers at any time to find out about their child's learning.

Parents received three reports a year: progress, formative and summative. Each report had a learning plan based on identified skills and areas for improvement, to help guide parents on next learning steps for the student. Teachers regularly updated parents when students were part of learning support or extension programmes. Parents commented that the use of a student logbook was a very effective means of providing communication between school and home about student achievement, progress and next learning steps.

The summative report provided parents with key overview information of their child's year, including:

- essential skills achievement;
- unit and achievement standard attainment;
- attendance; and
- curriculum level (basic, proficient, advanced).

Next learning steps were discussed with parents and students at interviews. Targeted meetings with parents included explaining the curriculum areas and course selection. Interim reports were sent home prior to the interviews so that parents had a good knowledge of student progress and next learning steps before the interviews occurred.

Conclusion

Meeting the learning needs of all students is a complex and demanding role 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.

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; and
- correctly interpreted the information to report the achievements and progress of individual and groups of students and to identify their next learning steps.

This report builds on the findings of the main ERO report *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*, published in March 2007. This and other ERO evaluations have shown, overall, that assessment practice in schools can be improved considerably. While the Ministry of Education has made a substantial investment in professional development programmes and developing assessment tools, with a strong focus on literacy and numeracy, many schools still need help in developing schoolwide assessment policies, procedures and practices across all aspects of students' learning. The aim of this report is to help secondary schools in reviewing and improving their assessment practices for the benefit of students.

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