

RAISING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT THROUGH TARGETED ACTIONS

DECEMBER 2015

Raising student achievement through targeted actions

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Foreword

This report reinforces the importance for schools to identify the specific needs of individual students and to build a plan around those needs to raise student achievement for all.

The biggest challenge for the New Zealand education system is the persistent disparities in achievement. Setting effective targets and creating the conditions in which all kids can excel will reduce these disparities. When this happens, the focus is on the students with leaders and teachers adapting their practice to realise their students' potential.

This report is full of stories of schools taking action to make a difference for kids previously at risk of underachievement. The stories echo what we already know matters most in achieving positive student outcomes. The key ingredients for equity and excellence in education are articulated in the *School Evaluation Indicators*. At the heart of these stories is the expectation that every student can achieve excellence with the acknowledgement that some kids need more help than others to get there.

Setting the target and then taking effective action requires good information, scrutiny, perseverance and an approach in which all parties – leaders, teachers, trustees, parents and whānau, and students – are active and committed. Underpinning this is an ongoing cycle of evaluation – schools scrutinise data, identify the target, take action, monitor the impact and make any necessary changes.

This report gives leaders and teachers an insight into setting effective targets and accelerating progress. The stories complement the *School Evaluation Indicators*, the internal evaluation resource – *Effective School Evaluation: How to do and use internal evaluation for improvement* and other ERO reports about raising student achievement. Collectively, this information provides a library of the 'what' and the 'how' when it comes to improving student outcomes. It also shows that success is possible.



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Overview

To ensure every student achieves success our schooling system must provide high quality learning opportunities to meet the educational needs of all young New Zealanders. Schools are required to set targets and plan strategically, to focus their actions, and ensure they make a difference for any students at risk of not achieving. To reduce identified achievement gaps, leaders and teachers must also know whether their planned actions are having the desired effect on the students that need to make the most progress.

In this evaluation the Education Review Office (ERO) investigated the extent that targeted actions of schools supported the rate of progress of students who were at risk of not achieving. ERO did this to understand:

- > how setting and responding to annual targets helped schools make a difference for selected students and reduced the gap in student achievement
- > how actions in setting targets for selected students improved teaching practice
- > how strategic and evaluative capability¹ of leaders in participating schools was applied in the school improvement process.²

ERO's evaluation focused on the 2014 targeted actions of schools and their outcomes for learners, and 2015 targets and plans. The evaluation included 41 secondary schools (representing a total roll of 32,874 students) and 310 primary schools (representing a total roll of 59,871 students) reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2015.

ERO found that many schools had a focus on underachievement when setting targets. However, schools were less effective in taking actions to raise achievement. Two key conditions were required for effective target setting in successful schools. These were having:

- > optimum challenge in the targets, to 'stretch' expectations for success
- > maximum visibility of targets, so that those needing to take actions (trustees, leaders, teachers, students, parents and whānau) shared responsibility.

Some of the most successful schools (especially primary schools) set targets for fewer students than the less successful schools. They had a clear understanding of who the students were that they needed to target actions to accelerate progress for and were able to monitor their actions to determine if they resulted in positive actions for them.

Successful schools had a range of other conditions or practices that contributed to their success in accelerating achievement. The most important of these were:

- > their explicit moral commitment to excellence and equity when framing targets and taking action for selective students, to close the achievement gap between them and other learners
- > the quality of their leadership at multiple levels when planning actions
- > the quality of their teamwork and professional learning conversations when taking actions
- > their successful application of professional capabilities to build school capacity for sustaining improvement in future.

1 Timperley, H. and Parr, J. (2010). *Evidence, Inquiry and Standards*. Chapter 1 in 'Weaving Evidence, Inquiry and Standards to Build Better Schools. Wellington: NZCER Press. Timperley and Parr define evaluative capability as (i) identifying what outcomes for students are desired and necessary, (ii) defining how much progress in outcomes is necessary over time and (iii) collecting the information needed to make judgements about learner progress and outcomes.

2 Hopkins (2007) defines school improvement as aiming to raise student achievement by improving the quality and capability of teachers. Hopkins, D. (2007). *Every School a Great School*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

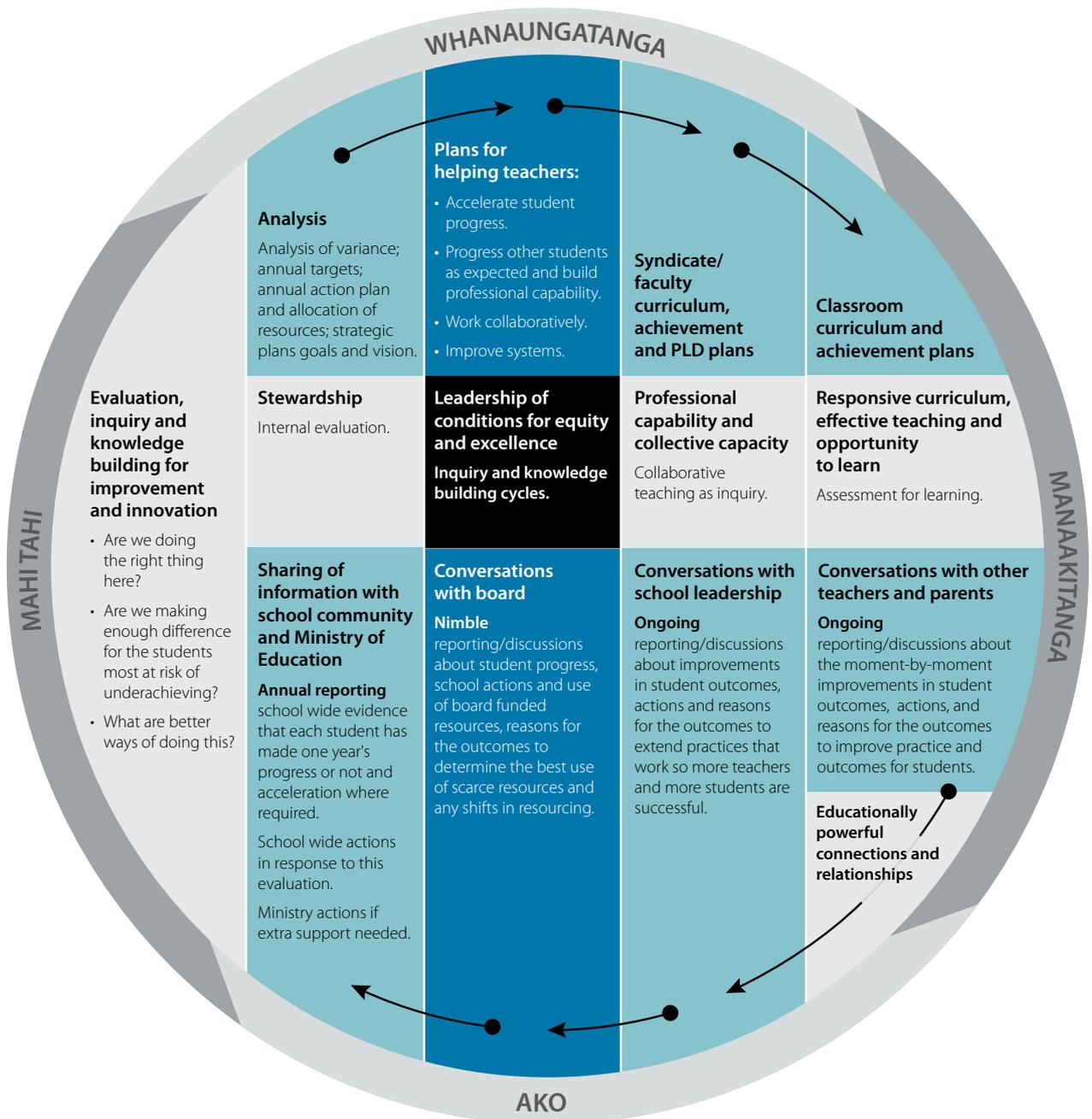
In the less successful schools targets were often more generalised, without clearly identifying the students that teachers needed to focus on. As a result, there was less coherence in the actions that teachers used to respond to at-risk students' needs and interests. Individual teachers may have been taking actions to raise the achievement for selected students, but these actions were not coordinated across the school.

There were two key qualities that distinguished the actions of the more successful schools in raising student achievement from the less successful. These were coherence and alignment:

- > coherence meant plans made sense to those implementing them in practice
- > alignment meant the actions of a range of people had a common purpose.

School leaders played a significant role in creating both coherence and alignment in successful schools. Their ability to influence teaching practice, the school culture and its central values lifted outcomes for students. Leaders effectively managed a series of cyclic school processes and action-planning conversations that meant everyone from the board to the parents, *whānau* and students knew their role in raising achievement. Some key features of the cyclic processes (top half of Figure 1) and action-planning conversations (bottom half of Figure 1) that created both coherence and alignment of targeted actions are outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Creating coherence and alignment by targeting in successful schools



Next steps

ERO recommends that:

1. **Boards of trustees** seek and scrutinise critical information about needs and interests of underachieving students, when setting annual achievement targets. This helps focus their discussions about planning for and resourcing an appropriate response to accelerate progress of target students over the next 12 months.
2. **School leaders** clearly identify those groups of students who need to improve, when planning the actions needed to make the necessary shifts in student achievement. This focuses subsequent teachers' discussions in the school on to the range of actions that might be needed, including teachers' own attitudes and expectations, and the types of expertise that will make the difference for each group (see top half of Figure 1).
3. **School leaders and teachers** seek and use selected supplementary information to clearly identify the strengths, needs and interests of each targeted student, as this ensures any planned interventions are personalised or customised to individual needs.
4. **School leaders, teachers, targeted students and their parents or whānau** ensure the best possible coherence and alignment of their collective actions that accelerate student progress, through managed learning conversations at multiple levels (see bottom half of Figure 1).
5. **The Ministry of Education** reviews the content of its online guidance resources for school planning and reporting, to ensure the guidelines encourage schools to set more challenging targets and increase the visibility of individual student needs when target setting.
6. **The Ministry of Education** sets expectations that actions to achieve acceleration in schools' annual plans:
 - > clearly set out what trustees, leaders, teachers, students and their parents need to do to accelerate progress, and
 - > can be monitored to ensure they are accelerating progress.

Introduction

Background to this evaluation

Education increases the range of life choices and opportunities open to all New Zealanders. The challenge for New Zealand's education system is to bring more students than in the past to a higher achievement level, with a broader skill range and better equity of outcomes. This challenge is formally framed at the school level in the Government's education targets, one of which is to have 85 percent of 18 year olds achieving National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 or equivalent in 2017. This requires an improvement from a baseline of 74.5 percent in 2011. Achieving NCEA Level 2 is of significance as educational success at this level increases the range of opportunities for young people. This applies in terms of their further education, employment, income level, health outcomes and quality of life.³

To support this system target, the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) has worked since 2011 in selected secondary schools with target groups of secondary students who have potential but are at risk of not achieving NCEA Level 2.⁴ Since 2011, the Ministry has also supported selected primary schools to accelerate the progress of Years 1 to 8 students who are achieving 'below' or 'well below' National Standards in mathematics, reading and writing for their year group.

System requirements for all schools

All New Zealand state schools are required to set annual targets and take actions for improvement within a strategic planning and review cycle. Every school's charter must contain an annually updated section that states the board's targets for student outcomes, its aims, directions, and objectives for school performance and its plan for resource use.⁵ The Ministry school planning and reporting requirements⁶ include the need to set at least one annual target for improvement in student achievement and to plan, implement and evaluate the actions required to achieve this target. The board's annual plan should clearly outline the actions proposed for lifting student achievement over the next year. The details in the plan should be informed by the school's analysis of its last year's performance.

Requirements for primary schools

Primary schools must report each year to the Secretary for Education on numbers and proportions of students 'above', 'at', 'below', or 'well below' National Standards at each year level (including sub-groups of Māori, Pacific, Pākehā and Asian students by gender and year level).

3 Ministry of Education, (2014). *Aspiration and Achievement: Education System Briefing to Incoming Minister*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.govt.nz/ministry-of-education/our-role-and-our-people/briefings-to-incoming-ministers/>.

4 In this initiative the Ministry defined these groups as Māori students, Pasifika students and English language learners (ELLs).

5 Under Section 61 of the Education Act.

6 Under National Administration Guideline 2.

Current achievement patterns nationally

National public achievement information published by the Ministry each year since 2011 shows incremental shifts in the proportion of students achieving NCEA Level 2 (or equivalent) and National Standards each year. The proportion of Māori and Pacific students achieving benchmarks has risen steadily each year. However, there are still proportionally fewer Māori and Pacific students achieving the benchmarks than other students.

<https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/topics/national-education>

Research on best approaches for achievement challenges

There has been a marked increase in recent years in research outlining the factors that contribute to achievement and actions that counter underachievement in schools.

1. **International research** on school leadership shows that *pedagogical leadership* has a key influence on improving student outcomes for diverse learners.⁷ Target or goal setting is important within pedagogical leadership because it creates high expectations. Pedagogical leaders take key actions that make the link between direction setting and wider school processes of strategic and curriculum planning, pedagogical development and focused resourcing.⁸
2. **New Zealand research** on effective school improvement shows that schools need to combine processes of target setting based on achievement information, with planning in-school actions. To succeed, schools need to apply their time and money strategically, so that they build teacher capacity. Student achievement and engagement is improved through the resulting improved learning opportunities.⁹
3. **ERO's School Evaluation Indicators (2015)** are drawn from an analysis and synthesis of research and evaluation findings linked to student outcomes. They focus on what makes the most difference to achieve equity and excellence in primary and secondary schooling. This requires a national effort to reduce the achievement disparity within and across schools, improve education provision and outcomes for all students, and ensure that Māori achieve education success as Māori.
4. **Meta-analyses** pulling together large international studies of learning and teaching show that to accelerate learning, in-school conversations need to focus on defining progress and implementing interventions for students at risk of underachieving. Educational officials, school leaders and teachers need to work together more collaboratively than they have in the past for successful educational reform.¹⁰

7 Robinson V. et al. (2009) *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Best Evidence Synthesis Programme. Robinson et al define pedagogical leadership as those actions involving school leaders in establishing a strong academic mission, monitoring and providing feedback on teaching and learning, and promoting professional development.

8 Robinson, V. (2007). *School Leadership and Student Outcomes: Identifying What Works and Why*. William Walker Oration. Melbourne: ACEL Monograph Series. Pages 8-17.

9 Timperley, H. et al. (2010). *Towards an Optimal Model for Building Better Schools*. Chapter 2 in 'Weaving Evidence, Inquiry and Standards to Build Better Schools', Wellington: NZCER Press.

10 Hattie, J. (2015). *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise*. London: Pearson. Pages 3-28.

Recent ERO national evaluations on student achievement

Since 2012, the Education Review Office (ERO) has published four national evaluation reports investigating how well schools are raising achievement levels to Government expectations. This study builds on these earlier evaluations.

1. Increasing Educational Achievement in Secondary Schools¹¹ evaluated a short-term initiative to support the achievement of a target cohort of Year 12 students in 12 schools. ERO found that four approaches were commonly used among the practical strategies schools applied:

- > individualised learning and support
- > careful tracking and monitoring of achievement changes
- > positive relationships with students and families
- > robust review and improvement of teaching and support initiatives.

2. Raising Achievement in Primary Schools¹² reported how well primary schools were accelerating learning so that the numbers of students achieving 'at' or 'above' National Standards increased annually. The evaluation focused on the actions taken to accelerate progress for Māori or Pacific students who were initially reported as 'below' or 'well below' expectations. The report found:

- > about half the schools used a range of deliberate strategies to accelerate and sustain improvement
- > teachers at these schools were committed to trying new things when student progress was not satisfactory

- > teachers designed teaching and learning programmes that accelerated progress beyond the norm for a year's teaching for students at risk of not achieving
- > many schools planned actions across the three National Standards areas of reading, writing and mathematics
- > some schools focused their actions on just one of these National Standards areas and used actions in this area as a trial for possible wider application.

3. Raising Student Achievement in Secondary Schools.¹³ ERO evaluated how well secondary schools were analysing NCEA Level 2 data to plan adjusted practices in the following year. The report found that about a quarter of secondary schools analysed data effectively as part of strategic planning. Effective strategic planning in secondary schools combined:

- > planned developments in teacher capacity
- > curriculum adjustments and new learning pathways
- > wellbeing arrangements that contributed to lifts in achievement.

11 Education Review Office (2013). *Increasing Educational Achievement in Secondary Schools*. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz.

12 Education Review Office (2014). *Raising Student Achievement in Primary Schools*. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz.

13 Education Review Office (2014). *Raising Student Achievement in Secondary Schools*. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz.

4. **Achievement 2013-2017: Success for Students.**¹⁴ This report evaluated a Ministry initiative to have specialist advisors work with selected secondary schools whose NCEA achievement levels had greatest potential for improvement. The report found three key practices contributed to short term gains for students:

- > carefully matching each student with a caring, supportive adult who had regular conversations with them regarding their learning (learning conversations)
- > timely monitoring of student progress and achievement
- > maximising learning opportunities with extra targeted teaching, provided both during and outside regular school hours.

Purpose of this evaluation

This evaluation investigates school target setting and actions as key processes for school improvement, so that significant groups of students in schools will have their learning accelerated. ERO's analysis focused on the accelerated progress of individual students within target groups. ERO wanted to understand the extent that targeted actions by schools lifted student achievement, in particular for those students at risk of underachievement. ERO also wanted to understand the school-level conditions that supported accelerated learning¹⁵ for more positive outcomes for these students.

14 Education Review Office (2014). *Achievement 2013-2017*. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz.

15 For this evaluation ERO's definition of accelerated learning is student progress of more than one year's learning from a year's teaching.

Methodology

ERO focused on two key areas in the evaluation:

- > **Effective target setting.** This was defined by three criteria:
 - scanning achievement data
 - targets building on previous year's outcomes
 - targets having 'buy in' from teachers and students.

- > **Effective actions.** This was defined as:
 - a plan focused on underachievement
 - the school having more than 40 percent of targeted students making accelerated progress.

Further information about the methodology can be found in Appendix 2.

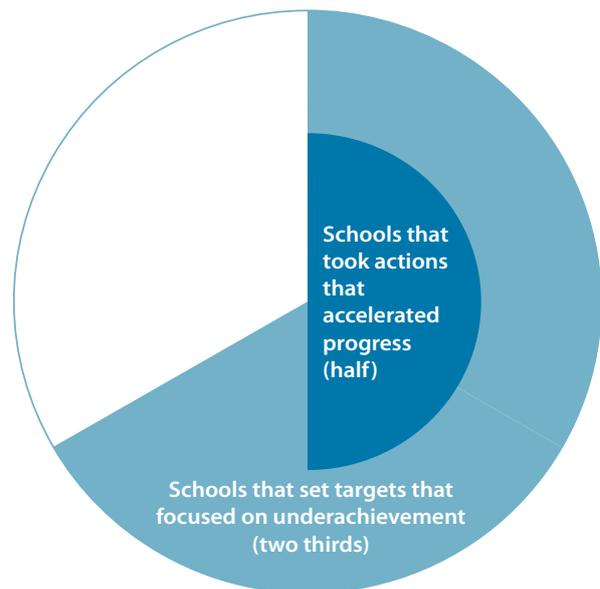
Findings

ERO found that almost two thirds of the schools in the sample set targets that focused on underachievement. However, only about a half of the schools took actions that accelerated progress for more than 40 percent of their targeted students.¹⁶

Some of the schools successfully accelerated the achievement of more than 70 percent of their target group. In these schools, targets made a real difference by focusing on both 'raising the bar' in overall achievement (excellence) and 'lifting the level' of underachievement to close the gap (equity). The target students were clearly identified, and board members, leaders, teachers, parents and whānau and students all knew what they had to do to make the desired improvement. In the best instances, schools provided targeted support for the students not achieving well and, at the same time, built teacher capability to avoid such underachievement in the future. Both students and teachers in these schools were energised by their visible success.

In schools that were not successful, a variety of issues hindered progress. In some cases targets were too general, outlining the percentage of students to reach the target without identifying individual students, their specific needs, or actions needed to accelerate their progress. In other schools, targets clearly identified the groups of students and outlined actions, but the actions were not clear or followed through. As a result few students in the target group in these schools accelerated their progress.

Overall secondary schools in the sample were less effective than primary schools in most areas of setting targets and responsive actions (Table 1).



¹⁶ See Appendix 3 for further data about schools' success with target setting.

Table 1: Number of primary and secondary schools effective in setting and responding to targets

2014 actions too general and not focused on acceleration	In 2014 up to 40% of targeted learners accelerated their progress	In 2014 40-69% of targeted learners accelerated their progress	In 2014 over 70% of targeted learners accelerated their progress
Primary: 57 Secondary: 21	Primary: 110 Secondary: 4	Primary: 79 Secondary: 9	Primary: 64 Secondary: 7

Only half the secondary schools set targets that focused on improving outcomes for students at risk of not achieving. Even where the focus was on acceleration, secondary schools were often less effective in accelerating learning for the students in the target group than primary schools. They took fewer key actions for success, or did these less effectively, than the successful primary schools. Primary schools have more specific requirements to report each year on the numbers and proportions of students not achieving. As a result boards and leaders of primary schools were generally clearer about the groups of students that needed to accelerate than secondary schools were.

Conditions and practices in successful schools

ERO found four key differences between the planning and actions of successful and less successful schools. The successful schools demonstrated:

- > an explicit commitment to equity and excellence
- > the effective targeting of progression
- > leadership at multiple levels
- > capability building for school improvement.

Accelerated progress

Achievement can be considered to be accelerated when a student makes more than one year's progress over a year on a trajectory that indicates they will achieve national standards or valued qualifications.

Commitment to equity and excellence

Successful schools demonstrated educational commitment to equity and excellence. They framed their achievement challenges effectively; resourced the required actions; made educationally powerful connections with students, parents and whānau; and ensured Māori enjoyed educational success as Māori.

Framing the achievement challenge in terms of target students

The key concepts of educational equity were clearly articulated in the successful schools: all students have the right to excellence and targeted actions for some are needed to achieve this. Teachers, leaders and trustees were committed to the students who needed extra support. They were also committed to the idea that there would be fewer students not achieving well next year.

Leaders led discussion about disparities¹⁷ in achievement that helped teachers and trustees understand the urgent need to respond to the gaps. As a result they understood the moral imperative of taking action as a matter of equity.¹⁸ At these schools it was clear where the issues of disparity and inequity were, for example:

- > among groups of learners at particular year levels
- > learning outcomes in a particular curriculum area
- > learning outcomes among those of particular gender or ethnicity.

Schools explored policies and practices in analytical discussions, to fully understand the reasons for disparity. They framed issues in ways that motivated leaders, teachers and trustees to do something differently or better than they had before. They took responsibility for changing the achievement picture to a more equitable one.

Senior managers oversee very thorough systems to monitor the progress and achievement of all students. Senior managers, team leaders, the class teacher and support teachers are all involved in the process of: identifying students needing support; deciding on the most appropriate support; and monitoring outcomes of the intervention. This is the regular process in the school.

(A large, urban contributing primary school)

Leaders modelled the way for everyone else in the school and its community to talk about achievement priorities, expectations and challenges. Leaders framed discussions about reasons for disparity in positive ways. As one principal said:

We now talk about targeting to improve learning in writing rather than remedial, which has such a negative connotation.

(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

Many schools had been supported by Ministry of Education personnel, or professional learning and development (PLD) providers, to have targets that specifically focused on those students who were at risk of underachieving. They were correctly advised against having targets that mixed these students with those who were already successful.

Following is an example of where a school had good assessment information but set a general target that included all students. The second column identifies what they could have done to specifically target students that needed to accelerate their progress.

17 Timperley, H. and Parr, J. (2004). *Using Evidence in Teaching Practice*. Auckland: Hodder Beckett Moa. Timperley and Parr define seeing disparity as recognising unwanted patterns in results when collating evidence from assessments that show a wide spread in outcomes for identified groups of learners.

18 Fullan, M. (2005). *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership*. California: Corwin Press. Fullan defines the moral imperative as the need for schools to both raise the bar and close gaps in achievement to achieve equity for all learners.

What the school was already doing:	What the school might do next:
<p>The school has the past data, it is well analysed, and trends and patterns are clearly documented. However, they have set overall percentage targets that do not identify specific groups requiring particular actions to raise their achievement. An action plan for a more specific target group could be easily developed by the English Faculty, where teachers are already using deliberate acts of teaching.</p>	<p>The school needs to develop targets that focus on priority learners, using the school's achievement information at Years 7 and 8 and NCEA Level 2 to do this. A logical example of a suitable 2015 target that responds to their data would be to 'accelerate the progress of the 22 Year 8 students (most of whom are boys) from the 'below' category, to 'at' or 'above' the National Standard by the end of the year'.</p>

(Urban secondary school, Year 7 to 13)

Resourcing the required actions to lift achievement

Boards of successful schools made careful decisions about where best to allocate the resources they had. These boards had high levels of ownership of school targets and regularly reviewed progress and the success of the learning opportunities being provided. The reports from principals to their boards included updates of the actions undertaken by teachers. This information was accompanied by student achievement data to show progress throughout the year.

Trustees made informed decisions about resources for:

- > particular students, to increase their chances of success as learners
- > particular teachers, to improve their instructional capability
- > overall school capacity building, by improving the school's systems and processes.

Examples of targeting key resourcing to support their actions included:

- > creating new leadership and teacher roles to lead the school's response to underachievement
- > expanding or refocusing teacher PLD and release time for meetings to assist with the target students and actions
- > providing classroom materials, including digital devices and programmes to enhance new teaching strategies.

The examples below demonstrate how the board's stewardship role¹⁹ can make a difference to student learning and reduce underachievement.

Some schools changed budget allocations to prioritise targeted learning areas.

The budget for literacy teaching and learning resources was doubled after a workshop with teachers, trustees and leaders where student achievement information was looked into and targets set.

(Rural, Contributing Primary)

¹⁹ Education Review Office. (2015). *School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success*. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz. Education Review Office defines the board's stewardship role as applying collective leadership to the school's scrutiny of key activities for effectiveness and the planning of key actions for excellence and equity.

Other schools employed extra staff to work with small groups of targeted students.

The school made the decision to provide small group targeted instruction from an experienced teacher of literacy with Reading Recovery training for two hours per week. It was also seen as valuable to decrease the number of students in the Year 2 classes for part of the day to enable more targeted teaching for the rest of the Year 2 cohort. A specialist teacher was employed by the board for four half days a week for this.

(A medium-sized, rural full primary school)

Making educationally powerful connections

In successful schools trustees, leaders (at multiple levels) and teachers made educationally powerful connections with children, their parents and whānau. Teachers in these schools helped students participate and contribute more fully to their learning. Students who knew they were a target student felt both challenged and supported. Students were supported to understand the performance required for each curriculum level. They set personal goals and self-monitored progress.

The students know their levels and what they need to do next in order to progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The learning levels and next steps are visible in the classrooms. Individual achievement is celebrated in assemblies and with whānau.

(A medium-sized, urban intermediate school)

Effective goal setting and feedback from the teacher had a key role in making connections with learners and parents.

Teachers used learning goals effectively with each student. Their online learning blog/journal became a source of evidence of their progress and ongoing success as a writer. Students and parents received targeted information that helped the writing process in a constructive manner. Use of writing blogs, teacher feedback/feed forward, peer and parent feedback and affirmation helped these students accelerate their progress in writing.

(A large, urban full primary school)

Some interventions especially targeted greater parental involvement.

An early-morning writing group was established in the middle school run by the school literacy leaders. This was before school with 100 percent buy-in from students. Parents were very supportive of this group. There was constructive use of exemplars of writing across the school. A boys-only class was in place and there were regular 'boys-and-dads' evenings to show dads how they could support their sons in literacy.

(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

Teachers and leaders recognised that parents, families and whānau have a primary and ongoing influence on the development, learning and wellbeing of their children.

The school proactively created more positive relationships with parents. They actively worked to ensure all parents of target children attended writing workshops and understood how to help their children at home. Teachers and senior leaders provided phone numbers or email contacts where they could be contacted by parents. Teachers provided them with ongoing support to encourage their children with writing.

(A large, urban intermediate school)

Teachers developed genuine partnerships with parents so students had extended learning opportunities. One primary school did this in mathematics.

The teacher found that parents were not good at maths through a home-school learning partnership that she established. She developed games that gave the student and their parents positive mathematical experiences. Parents shared these experiences with the teacher through a home-school contact book.

(A large, urban contributing primary school)

Another primary school did this to support accelerated progress with writing.

Experiential evenings were held for parents and whānau to share the teaching of writing and how their children were being supported to experience new learning through the revised writing process. Parents went home from the meetings with a range of strategies that they could use to support writing and the language of learning how to be a better writer. There was a flow on of students using their writing skills and strategies into other learning areas.

(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

Ensuring Māori enjoyed educational success as Māori

Leaders, teachers and trustees in successful schools ensured that their actions led to success for Māori students. The actions these successful schools took align with the Māori education strategy, *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017*, and the factors in the strategy identified as improving Māori students' literacy, numeracy and language skills.²⁰ Māori students' identity, culture and interests shaped the response to underachievement in a number of successful schools.

The following example illustrates both the *Ka Hikitia* actions and the successful targeting actions described in this report. This school is a small rural full primary school where Māori students make up 99 percent of the roll.

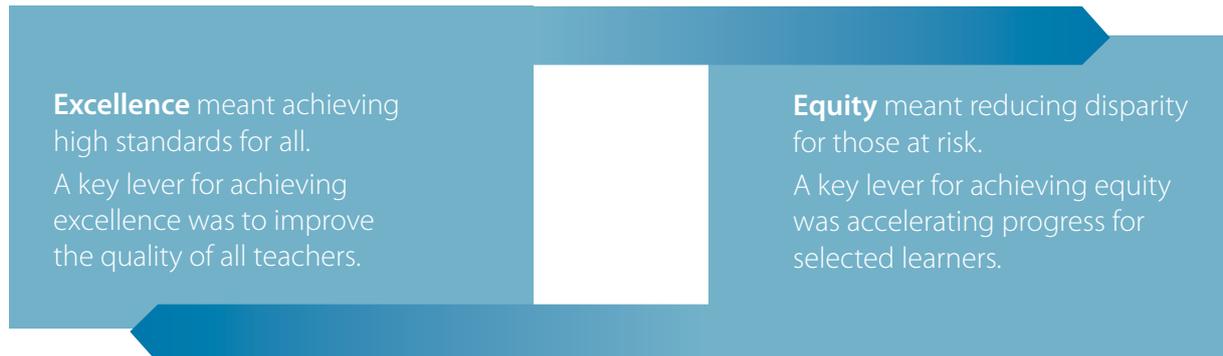
20 Ministry of Education, (2013). *Ka Hikitia – Accelerating Success 2013–2017*. Wellington: The Ministry. pp 35–36.

Targeting actions	School practices	Ka Hikitia actions
<p>The school:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > framed disparities for action > put scrutiny into inquiry > fostered collaboration and commitment > provided optimum challenge and maximum visibility. 	<p>Teachers analysed each year's reading, writing and mathematics data and evaluated the effectiveness of their teaching to determine which curriculum areas were in need of development. Reading and writing were prioritised as areas for improvement in 2014, especially boys' achievement. For teachers the priority was the provision of contextual learning opportunities that the students were interested in. The principal and the board developed and resourced action plans to support the students at risk of underachieving in writing. Teachers held fortnightly meetings to discuss these learners and their progress. They also discussed next steps and targeted actions.</p> <p>Throughout the year the board received regular reports about progress. Just over half of the 13 students at risk of underachieving accelerated their progress and were working at curriculum expectation by the end of the year. Writing continued to be a priority in 2015 to help other students achieve at expectation.</p>	<p>Schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > use their student achievement data to target resources for optimal effect > retain high expectations of students to succeed in education as Māori.
<p>Leaders, teachers, students, parents and whānau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > worked at multiple levels to plan and put in place interventions > used their skills and built overall capacity for sustaining improvement. 	<p>Teachers had a relationship with whānau that was focused on students' learning. Teachers and local iwi developed their Kuhukuhu initiative, applying authentic contextual matauranga Māori experiences with significant community role models. These experiences were designed to also be the contexts for reading and writing. An example of this involved three boys at risk of underachieving. The boys worked with their whānau and kaiako to use a hinaki to trap tuna, to smoke the tuna using manuka they had sourced and then manaki (hosted) their pakeke (elders) with kai. This experience provided students with a context that they enthusiastically wrote about. Professional development provided teachers with strategies to support small groups of at risk students develop skills of comprehension, vocabulary and fluency.</p>	<p>Leaders and teachers with parents and whānau:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > integrate elements of students' identity, language and culture into the curriculum, teaching and learning > provide early support for those students at risk of falling behind.

Figure 2: Excellence and equity in successful schools

Successful schools differed from unsuccessful schools mainly because of their explicit commitment to making a difference for students at risk of underachieving.

These schools set out to achieve the twin goals of excellence and equity. This required school actions to sustain improvement for the majority while also closing the gaps for those at risk of underachieving.



Actions in successful schools	Actions in unsuccessful schools
<p>In this evaluation successful schools all:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > applied 'excellence for all' as their key operating premise <p style="text-align: center;">▼</p>	<p>In contrast, unsuccessful schools all:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > applied 'business as usual' as their key operating premise <p style="text-align: center;">▼</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > sustained the successful path of positive progress of most students <p style="text-align: center;">▼</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > accepted differential rates of progress for different student groups as normal <p style="text-align: center;">▼</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > accelerated the progress of targeted students <p style="text-align: center;">▼</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > accepted achievement patterns where some learners made slower progress than others <p style="text-align: center;">▼</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > acted effectively to focus on underachievement as a matter of equity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > failed to act effectively on the inequity perpetuated by their earlier actions.

Key processes in targeting progress

Successful schools used four key processes in targeting progress effectively. They included:

- > being clear about what progress looks like
- > setting goals and targets to shape desired progress
- > applying staff capabilities to achieve desired progress
- > judging progress using quality evidence.

ERO found professional learning conversations were central to each process.

Being clear about what one year's progress looks like

The teaching responses to underachievement in successful schools were underpinned by a shared understanding of what one year's progress looks like. This clarified expectations. Teams had an important role in defining and measuring expected progress.

Teams develop their assessments together as a group and are part of the decision making about what counts as valid and reliable assessment and achievement information. Ongoing moderation amongst the team, and oversight by the team leader, leads to a real robustness in teacher understanding and decision making about student progress and achievement. Over the past two years, considerable time has been spent on the validity of assessment and achievement.
(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

Many successful schools developed matrices or exemplars of work to show what characterised each year's expectations. These were shared with students and their parents. Sometimes wall displays shared these expectations.

Teachers worked together to make sure that their moderation of writing was consistent. They moderated with teachers from other schools who were in the same cluster of schools. Their Learning Walls identified what excellent writers did. Indicators were agreed by the teacher and the students in the class. The indicators could be used to set purposeful intentions/goals that individual students could select from and work towards. The indicators also provide themes for teachers and act as accountability prompts. The Learning Walls helped both parents and the teacher to frame discussions with the child on what he or she needed to learn next in order to work towards being able to do what all excellent writers do. Excellence is one of the school's values.
(A small, rural full primary school)

Successful schools developed specific plans for focusing teaching and assessment on what mattered most to make expected progress.

Student data underpins every decision made regarding student learning and achievement, curriculum design, teaching practice and resourcing. Senior leaders and teachers have put in place a school-wide writing plan to increase the focus on deliberate acts of teaching writing. They also developed a glossary of key terms for consistency in the language of learning used to describe progress in writing across the school. Syndicates have created 'assessment walls' to track and monitor target students. Moderation is done through the use of writing progressions combined with the use of e-asTTle (online assessment tool) and the PaCT (progress and consistency tool). The teachers have also participated in writing moderation with other schools. Teachers were becoming more consistent in their judgements over time.
(A medium-sized, rural contributing primary school)

Translating high expectations into goals and student targets

Leaders at successful schools set high expectations for all learners. They also promoted collective actions among teachers to ensure the best possible chance that targets would be achieved.

In these schools, leaders used the required planning and reporting processes as strategic alignment tools to apply key goals, set targets, focus internal evaluation, plan interventions and reduce disparity. Strategic alignment meant linkages were strong between key school plans and processes, including:

- > the wider school goals and objectives
- > the planning and reporting process including the annual setting of targets
- > objectives for teacher appraisal and 'teaching as inquiry'
- > class targets for individual student progress.

Table 2 shows the alignment in two successful schools between school goals, an annual achievement target, and class targets included as part of an appraisal plan and/or a 'teaching as inquiry' plan.

Table 2: Examples of strategic alignment in successful schools

School goal 	In School A: All students will access <i>The New Zealand Curriculum</i> as evidenced by (accelerated) progress and achievement in relation to National Standards (NS). NS are used effectively to support improvement in children's outcomes.	In School B: All students will leave with a minimum NCEA Level 2 or equivalent.
One 2014 target 	Target group of 28 current Year 2 students who achieved 'below' for their after Year 2 NS in reading. Within this target group there are four subgroups who need different rates of progress. This target was selected because this group was the largest 'below' group in the school in 2013 end of year data. Eight of the 28 learners are Māori and there are equal numbers of boys and girls.	Target group of 105 Year 11 students that have been identified as 'at risk' of not getting all NCEA Level 1 literacy and/or numeracy credits required.
Classroom use of targets at beginning of the year	These 28 students will be reading at gold which is the expected level after three years at school. In particular, 10 students need support to shift from 'well below' to 'at' in NS.	Target for each form teacher: 10 of the target students from each form will have their 10 credits of both numeracy and literacy by the end of Term 3. Opportunities for gaining these credits will be identified with each student and their subject teachers by week 3, Term 1.

Because of this close alignment, teachers, leaders and trustees at successful schools:

- > knew the students they needed to help accelerate progress
- > knew how these students were progressing
- > knew why particular educational responses had made a difference.

This created a clear 'line of sight'²¹ from the school's goals to outcomes for students. There was clear alignment between school goals, achievement targets and improvement plans, the actions of groups of teachers, an individual teacher's professional development objectives, her/his class programme and priorities, and specific interventions to accelerate learning for students at risk of underachieving.

Leaders helped groups of teachers work together to plan key actions by promoting teacher collaboration. For example, they expected more collaborative discussions about practices that had evidence of success (example below).

In many ways, the greatest value to come from the 2014 target-setting process was the way the school responded collaboratively to the analysis of achievement in 2013. As a result of interrogating that data, leaders and teachers were able to identify more clearly the students who were still below the standard. They put students into three different groups reflective of the degree of their learning needs. Teachers researched best teaching and learning practice and engaged in PLD to build their capability where necessary.

(A medium-sized, urban full primary school)

Approaches for accelerating progress by applying expertise

Teachers in successful schools had a 'case management' approach²² to the learning and teaching of students at risk of underachieving. This meant that:

- > each student's progress, strengths and needs were regularly discussed
- > the effectiveness of teachers' responses were regularly explored
- > responsive follow-up actions were designed and evaluated.

Teacher meetings often focused on accelerating progress. In one school, teacher meetings led by a senior teacher focused on the rate of progress of individual targeted learners.

The Assistant Principal maintains a school target register of all students at each year level who are not achieving at National Standard. Students who have been part of targeted interventions remain on the register and are monitored closely for some time after they are judged to be 'on track'. Teachers talked about their actions that supported all the students on the register.

(A medium-sized, rural full primary school)

Some successful teaching responses included:

- > in-class strategies that supported students' learning collaboratively
- > resources and approaches that matched individual student's strengths and needs and gave extended learning opportunities
- > supplementary teaching to support classroom learning
- > using teachers with specific expertise e.g. teachers trained in Reading Recovery, Resource Teachers for Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Resource Teachers for Literacy, and Mathematics Support Teachers (MSTs).

Having specific expertise often made the crucial difference. One school found the following.

The involvement of the RTLB was significant in supporting teachers – and therefore students. The specialist's expertise and positive approach encouraged teachers to try her suggestions, share experiences and seek further support when needed.

(A medium-sized, rural contributing primary school)

21 Line of sight is a term used by ERO to describe a situation where a target is clearly visible to all who share it, and all the conditions are right for achieving the goal, thus ensuring success as far as possible.

22 Timperley, H. and Parr, J. (2010). Chapter 9 *Where to From Here? Taking Stock and Engaging in Meta-Inquiry*. In *Weaving Evidence, Inquiry and Standards to Build Better Schools* edited by Helen Timperley and Judy Parr. Wellington: NZCER Press. Timperley and Parr advocate for a case management approach to school improvement as a key way to build knowledge for effective enquiry and grow capability in schools.

In successful schools, teachers often worked more as partners with their students than they had in the past. They shared expectations and success criteria, so that students could take greater charge of their own learning.

Students know that they are target students. They know the goals set for them to meet in their lessons. Children recognise and highlight their growing abilities.

(A small, rural full primary school)

Teachers used authentic learning contexts and ensured that there were early successes that could be celebrated. This built student confidence and motivated students to learn.

Students started to generate their own learning tools and goal setting. For example some students were driven by the goal of becoming Phenomenal Writers. They created their own success criteria. Teachers broke writing into 'manageable chunks'. Teachers found this to be highly effective. Student self belief was the biggest contributor. Students commented that the feedback and feed-forward written in their books from teachers was very important for them. This was more detailed than what teachers had been doing in the past. Students' success was shared and published in school newsletters, Facebook and in classrooms.

(A medium-sized, rural contributing primary school)

Collaborating to judge progress and plan or review actions

In the most successful schools there was a high level of group collaboration.

These schools used their collaborations to build commitment to the work of reducing disparity. Teachers, leaders and trustees were committed to helping all students succeed, and helping each other provide the best possible educational experiences for their students.

The board of trustees receive regular reports from the principal about the target groups. Comparisons are made between the school and national or regional outcomes. The principal, in collaboration with the board, develops appropriate action plans that support the target students. These plans help enhance achievement, as the evaluation and analysis of each plan provides ongoing direction for teachers and middle leaders.

(A small, rural full primary school)

Effective professional learning conversations were central to these collaborations.²³ Through shared conversations, teachers and leaders decided what they might do to accelerate learning, or discussed how well things seemed to be going.

Collective ownership of student progress and achievement was very evident in this school. Teaching syndicates in particular played a key role in collaborative sharing and strategising to accelerate students' progress and plan how best to support students with special needs. There was ongoing focus on working together to shift the achievement of those 'at' National Standards level to the 'above' level.

(A large, urban contributing primary school)

Teaching groups were also committed to monitoring and improving their own practices.

Teaching teams provided close regular monitoring of all target students in terms of progress and achievement. They created action plans for target students showing specific support strategies, especially direct acts of teaching and next steps for learning for students. These were regularly reviewed by the team and reported to the principal.

(A large, urban contributing primary school)

²³ Hattie, J. (2015). *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise*. London: Pearson. Hattie argues that the key role of professional learning conversations in school improvement is in 'shifting the narrative' in schools from standards and benchmarks to learning and collaboration.

Teams applied data literacy.²⁴ Data was carefully analysed by teaching groups.

Professional learning groups (PLGs) are used to interrogate the data and share strategies to improve professional practice for these target students. The strategies of these PLGs are very well documented, monitored and analysed through syndicate leaders, the senior leaders and then to the principal.

(A medium-sized, urban full primary school)

In the most successful schools there were both highly effective target setting and highly effective action for accelerating progress. In these schools strategic alignment around the targets led to a wide range of effective collaborative actions across the school community (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Effective targeting for progression

Targeting in successful schools combined two key school improvement processes: **goal setting that works** and **team processes for accelerating progress**.

1. Goal setting that works

Goal setting in successful schools created:



2. Team processes for accelerating progress



School leadership at multiple levels

The importance of school leadership²⁵ in effective targeting is the central theme of the findings in this report. School leaders influenced outcomes in successful schools mainly through their leadership of pedagogy and their impact on school culture and values.²⁶ In successful schools leaders designed, resourced and implemented targeted actions with a focus on improving both student outcomes and school capacity for equity. They did this through a series of cyclical school processes, and inter-related learning conversations between key parties.

²⁴ Earl, L. and Katz, S. (2006). *Leading in a Data Rich World*. California: Corwin Press. Earl and Katz define data literacy as (i) framing good questions; (ii) collecting good data; (iii) applying good thinking.

²⁵ In this report ERO uses the term 'school leader' to mean the school principal and any deputy, associate and assistant principals with responsibility for student achievement; 'middle leader' to mean any teacher other than the school leaders with a significant responsibility for student achievement; and either 'leaders' or 'school leadership' to apply to school leaders and middle leaders together.

²⁶ See Appendix 4 for details.

In successful schools, the actions planned by school leaders were spread across the teaching staff to use their in-school expertise to accelerate learning. Leaders of successful schools also applied inquiry effectively to improve the quality of teaching.

Spreading leadership to use in-school teacher expertise

Successful schools demonstrated a 'layering of school leadership'²⁷ for effective implementation of key actions. Four key levels of leadership in action were:

- > the **stewardship** level, trustees embedding a deep commitment to equity and excellence into the school's actions and culture (see Figure 2)
- > the **pedagogical leadership** level, leaders influencing the quality of the curriculum, teaching and learning across the school
- > the **middle leadership** level, leaders influencing curriculum design across classes; teaching as inquiry in professional learning communities²⁸; and promoting responsiveness to learner needs in every classroom
- > the **individual teacher** level, teachers influencing broader teacher capability and growth in confidence and connectedness of learners.²⁹

School leaders in successful schools distributed leadership³⁰ to teachers with pedagogical expertise in particular learning areas or aspects of learning that aligned with the schools' achievement challenge. This supported teaching teams and helped them plan and implement specific interventions to meet the needs of targeted students.

Pedagogical leadership roles seen in the interventions that made most difference for learners in successful schools included literacy and mathematics leaders, and special education needs coordinators.

The mathematics leader monitored the progress of all target students throughout the intervention. The senior leaders within the school, including the MST, met regularly to discuss the progress and wellbeing of each student and to discuss strategies that might further support teachers' teaching and students' learning.

(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

Middle leaders who had the expertise that matched a specific local achievement challenge played a critical role in some successful schools by linking targets with the actions of teaching teams.

This school is building its bicultural strategy by growing the understanding, ownership and personal commitment of teachers to raising the achievement of Māori students throughout the college. The school appointed a full-time Māori tutor to work with teachers to implement the Effective Teacher Profile (Bishop and Berryman³¹). The college set a goal of 98% of teachers integrating a 'window into practice' into their inquiry approach.

(An urban, Year 9 to 13 secondary school)

27 Day, C. (2011). Chapter 2 *The Layering of Leadership*. In 'Leadership and Learning' edited by Jan Robertson and Helen Timperley. London: Sage Publishing. Day argues that the 'layering of leadership' from senior to middle leaders and then to teachers is the most important single factor in successful school improvement.

28 Timperley, H. and Parr, J. (2004). *Using Evidence in Teaching Practice*. Auckland: Hodder Beckett Moa. Timperley and Parr define a professional learning community as a group of teachers who work as a team to share ideas and help each other through interactions that focus on improving teaching or learning. Page 115.

29 Education Review Office (2015) positions confidence and connectedness as key qualities needed by students as a foundation for success as a lifelong learner, pages 18 and 19.

30 Spillane, J. et al. (2011). Chapter 12 *A Distributed Perspective on Learning Leadership*. In 'Leadership and Learning' edited by Jan Robertson and Helen Timperley. London: Sage Publishing. Spillane et al explain how distributing leadership effectively to teachers with professional expertise is a critical step in accelerating learning for students who are at risk of underachieving.

31 Bishop, R., O'Sullivan, D. and Berryman, M. (2010). *Scaling Up Educational Reform: Addressing the Politics of Disparity*. Wellington: NZCER Press. Pp 18–21.

In secondary schools middle leaders sometimes had a prominent role in effecting school change. These leaders were either the head of department (HOD) or the head of faculty. In most cases they did this by setting class targets and lifting expectations for learner success. Often these targets informed the school's annual plan.

The overall target for 2015 was set by the HOD English in association with her staff. The principal then took it to the board as part of the annual plan. The target is linked to the school goal of "each student will leave the college with the appropriate qualifications to enable them to have choices." There are then more specific targets related to NCEA and National Standards. Responding to target students is an expectation from the HOD English and will be reported to principal and board through analysis of variance in annual reporting.

(Secondary Year 7 to 13 school, main urban area)

In other secondary schools, middle leaders worked to influence targeted learning outcomes as soon as possible after new students at risk of underachieving arrived. In some cases the actions of middle leaders were focused on teaching practice.

Effectively led co-construction meetings in departments are a significant feature for the promotion of teacher expertise in classrooms. Teachers critically reflect on their practice, identify specific teaching strategies and differentiate learning practices for students who are having difficulty achieving. Teachers recognise the value of sharing knowledge about students.

(Secondary Year 9 to 13 school, main urban area)

In other cases middle leaders had a focus on particular groups of learners.

The school had three facilitators for Te Kotahitanga (TK) and had meetings between the class teachers and the TK facilitators looking at every Māori student in their classes, to track student progress. This enabled teachers to set their own goals to better

support the progression and achievement of Māori students, which was then linked with each teacher's 'teaching as inquiry'.

(Secondary Year 7 to 13 school, secondary urban area)

Individual teachers played their part in fostering school success by sharing ideas with other teachers, and involving both students and their parents in key actions.

This school developed a reading behaviour and deliberate acts of teaching resource to inform individual teacher planning. Team and peer meetings of teachers throughout the year focused on sharing reading practices and the strategies that they were using. Individual teachers identified and tracked the progress of targeted boys in their class. Class teachers explored different ways of communicating and supporting families. They have highlighted what children were doing well, shared next steps and explained how parents can help at home.

(A large, urban contributing primary school)

In many successful schools (especially primary schools) school leaders played a key role in linking the target setting actions of trustees with the teamwork of teachers. For example, in one successful primary school the plans and actions to accelerate learning were dramatically intensified when a new principal was appointed at the end of Term 2, 2014.

The 'business as usual' situation was dramatically changed when a new leadership team was appointed mid-way through last year. The principal 'flipped' the culture of the school from an inputs focus with little review, to a professional culture with a student outcomes focus. The development of evidence-based practice has provided a foundation to motivate and energise teachers to look more deeply at their teaching practice. In doing so, they can build on students' strengths, and target gaps in skills and understandings.

(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

Leaders and teachers applying 'teaching as inquiry'³²

Leaders in successful schools used inquiry to help teachers and trustees surface inequities and plan improvements. This started with a focus on patterns in student achievement data.

Last year the charter targets became an explicit focus for classroom teachers. The teachers monitored the progress of target students and inquired into contributing factors in focus group meetings where teachers brought along evidence of their practice and how they were improving the achievement of these students.

(An urban, full primary school)

Groups of teachers had many discussions with an inquiry theme.

The establishment of professional learning groups that focus on teaching as inquiry and providing teachers with opportunities to discuss and share successful teaching strategies has been successful and is continuing in 2015. Teachers talk of their successes, they evaluate the evidence and are buoyed by the results. They also explore the interventions they have tried in the past that have worked.

(An urban, intermediate school)

Most teachers' inquiries into effectiveness were centred on individual students identified at risk of underachieving. The inquiry questions were explored with other teachers and leaders. Systems were sometimes modified to help in scanning for evidence about what was working and what needed to be modified.

Teaching as inquiry is another arm actively fostered to accelerate the target group. Each ako (syndicate) tracks their target students on a register and talks about the effectiveness of their classroom practices. Teachers understand the urgency to progress their target students.

(An urban, contributing primary school)

Boards' inquiries into teaching effectiveness were also important in making key resourcing decisions in some schools.

Here the board asked the critical question of what difference the intervention was making before they agreed to fund it for a second year.

(An urban, contributing primary school)

In some cases, attention to the details of interventions that were adopted from external sources was particularly important in the inquiry supporting acceleration.³³

The school's PLD focused on the Te Kotahitanga programme's key principles: knowing your Māori learner; using effective feedback; applying Ako in the classroom; and integrating elements of tikanga Māori. Teachers were expected to inquire into one of these areas and plan necessary actions. As a result there was very strong evidence of closing the gap.

(Secondary Year 7 to 13 school, secondary urban area)

32 The Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Page 35. Teaching as inquiry is defined in *The New Zealand Curriculum* as inquiry into the teaching and learning relationship that uses a cyclical problem solving approach.

33 Fullan (2005) calls this fidelity of purpose. He argues it is vital for successful adaptation of external interventions.

Figure 4: Leadership by learning conversations in successful schools

There were two main types of learning conversation in successful schools.



Capability building for school improvement

Every successful school's planned actions ensured that at least 40 percent of targeted students made more than one year's progress. Leaders in these schools focused action on building professional capability of teachers. In turn this built collective capacity of staff.

ERO found successful schools structured capability building for school improvement around a series of productive professional learning conversations.³⁴ There were two main types of professional learning conversations – one focused on how to accelerate learning and the other on how to improve teaching (see Figure 4).

Learning conversations focused on how to accelerate learning

Accelerating learning was a key theme in many conversations in successful schools. Regular meetings to discuss how to accelerate learning and whether acceleration was fast enough were a feature in many schools that succeeded in accelerating progress for target students. For example in one successful primary school:

The Deputy Principal provided release time for teachers to prepare, plan, discuss and monitor the progress that target students were making. Weekly planning and review meetings were held with classroom teachers, team leaders and the senior leadership team (SLT). The school was very rigorous in ensuring the planned intervention was happening and having the intended impact. Formative and summative data was collected regularly and the SLT monitored the effect size of the gains being achieved.

(A large, urban contributing primary school)

Schools made changes when the improvement from an adopted intervention did not match what was expected. For example, in one school that was involved in the Accelerated Literacy Learning (ALL) programme:

The school identified being on the ALL programme as central to its success in accelerating achievement. However, they were very clear that, in the first year, they had misinterpreted the programme and withdrew students from the classroom for extra tuition. This was not successful enough in accelerating students. It was not until this was abandoned and the acceleration programme was brought back into the classroom setting that students began to progress at a good rate. Though this was more difficult to resource the school believes it is well worth dealing with the resourcing and organisational challenges that in-class delivery creates.

(A medium-sized, urban full primary school)

³⁴ Timperley, H. and Parr, J. (2004). *Using Evidence in Teaching Practice*. Auckland: Hodder Beckett Moa. Timperley and Parr define the key focuses of professional learning conversations as being to use evidence to improve learning opportunities and improve the quality of teaching (Appendix 5).

There were multiple conversations at different levels in schools committed to raising achievement for groups of students. Leaders worked with teaching teams to plan and implement the actions needed for acceleration. Consequently teachers discussed possible strategies with parents and whānau of target students.

For example, in a secondary school in an urban area with 50 percent Māori students and 20 percent Pacific students, multiple conversations took place at four levels.

Level 1: Teachers planning early intensive support for those students at risk of falling behind

The school's co-construction meetings were a feature where class teachers reviewed the progress of individuals across all curriculum areas. The meetings promoted teacher expertise in classrooms. Teachers critically reflected on their practice, identified specific teaching strategies and differentiated learning practices for students who were having difficulty achieving. They recognised the value of sharing knowledge about students. Class teachers had knowledge, ownership, and buy-in of targets and worked collaboratively to accelerate learning for boys at risk.

Level 2: Teachers creating productive partnerships with parents, whānau, hapu, iwi, communities and business that were focussed on educational success

Parents and whānau and teachers met formally at the school during Academic Day. During this day, boys worked with their parents and whānau and teachers to set learning goals. These goals and subject choices were about how they planned learning pathways based on their aspirations. Teachers, parents and whānau and boys worked together and discussed how they could achieve success. The school has established a smart-phone app to keep parents and whānau informed of their son's progress and achievements.

Level 3: Teachers sharing high expectations with students and parents and whānau

Boys were set high expectations and were well supported by the school and parents and whānau. The holistic approach to the way boys learn and the school culture of success for all was well embedded in the school. High expectations for achievement and behaviour promoted a settled environment. Young men experienced respectful relationships based on shared values and had access to high quality counselling and healthcare. Māori and non-Māori student achievement was comparable, with school results continuing to improve.

Level 4: Teachers discussing appraisal objectives and performance management criteria with middle leaders

The robust Performance Management and Appraisal System (PMAS) guided how the school promoted and managed ongoing change. The PMAS provided all leaders and teachers with a framework for critical self reflection that was aligned to strategic goals, professional learning and development initiatives, targeted student achievement and curriculum design and delivery. Whole school professional learning for teachers and leaders was strong and students' achievement outcomes have improved. Self review was rigorous, highly effective and underpinned positive performance and continuous improvement.

Some conversations about maximising learning opportunities for acceleration included curriculum redesign that improved learning pathways and transitions.

The school has extensively redesigned their curriculum. A position of head of faculty for Year 7 to 10 has been established as a result of the restructuring of the junior school. The leadership and teachers worked closely together to establish clear guidelines for staff in implementing the new approach to teaching literacy across curriculum areas and through the transition from Years 7 and 8 to Years 9 and 10. The agreed guidelines were then transferred into individual classrooms. The school noted a positive shift in both reading and writing of the target students as a result. (Secondary Years 7 to 13 school, minor urban area)

Learning conversations focused on how to improve teaching

In many learning conversations in successful schools, improving teaching was a key theme. School leaders focused capability building through teacher appraisal processes, or key professional learning and development activities in prioritised learning areas. These were usually aspects of learning such as literacy and numeracy. In some of these learning conversations teachers asked whether the right things were being learned. Teachers and school leaders worked to make changes if the answer was 'no'.

In the past the maths programme focus was heavily weighted towards the Numeracy Project where students' numeracy stages framed the teaching programme. Using this approach was not preparing students well enough for Year 9 or meeting the needs of National Standards. Now the focus in maths is on providing more learning opportunities at Curriculum Level 4 which will enable the Year 7 and 8 students to learn more about measurement, geometry, statistics, probability and algebra. (A medium-sized, secondary Years 7 to 13 school)

Where school capacity was limited, externally sourced professional expertise was used to assist. This meant that teachers had access to the knowledge and expertise needed to focus their planned intervention on individual needs of targeted students.

In this school professional learning linked with appraisal engaged all staff. ALL was a big influence, meaning an extra hour's support each morning from the literacy coordinator working in-class with individual teachers in three solid coaching sessions per week. The ALL mentor, cluster meetings and sharing with wider ALL schools all contributed. (A medium-sized, contributing primary school)

Team collaboration was important in capability building. Members of teaching teams talked about how they could help each other teach more effectively.

Individual teachers were given targeted support within the team to grow their capability in teaching of writing. This happened through modelling, individual teacher support by a team leader or language unit member, or whole team discussions. (A medium-sized, contributing primary school)

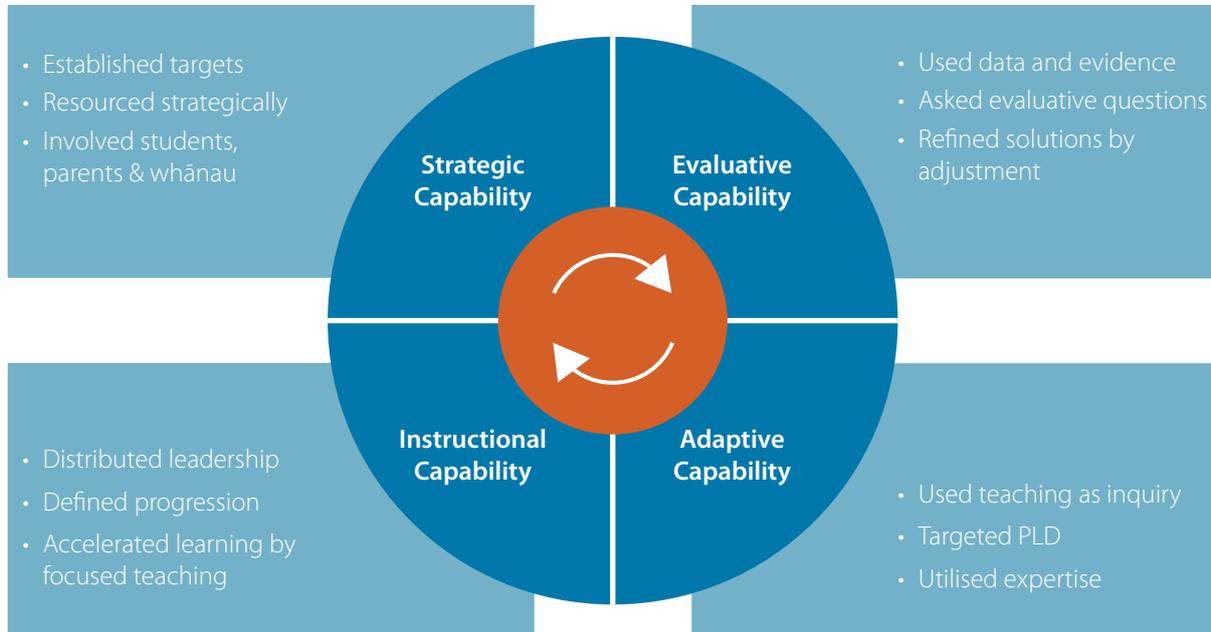
Appraisal was linked to student progress in some schools.

Teachers had an appraisal goal linked to target student progress. Because of this goal, teachers looked more closely at data, tracked target student progress more carefully and identified specific teaching actions to address underachievement. They were not afraid to try out a range of ideas. They then engaged in professional discussions with their appraiser to identify what had gone well and what needed to change. (A large, urban contributing primary school)

The most successful schools used effective learning conversations at multiple levels to apply the key capabilities of leaders and teachers in twelve critical areas of school improvement (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Building school capacity for raising achievement through targeted actions

Leadership in the most successful schools applied four key capabilities in twelve areas:



<p>To apply strategic capability, leaders and trustees:</p>	<p>To apply evaluative capability, leaders, teachers and trustees:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Established achievement targets within a broader consideration of the school goals, vision and values > Resourced strategically to support goal and target achievement by teachers > Involved learners, parents, whānau and communities in planned achievement initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Generated solutions for achievement challenges from data and evidence > Increased evaluative capacity by using evaluative questions (e.g. 'is this good enough?') > Refined solutions through trial and adjustment
<p>To apply instructional capability, school leaders and groups of teachers:</p>	<p>To apply adaptive capability, middle leaders with individual teachers:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Distributed leadership across formal and informal roles to people with instructional expertise > Planned accelerated progression for particular individuals and groups of learners > Transferred targets into curriculum achievement goals and personalised learning provisions for key target groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Planned interventions using teaching as inquiry for individual targeted learners > Participated in strong professional learning processes associated with specific achievement challenges > Utilised both internal and external expertise to build new knowledge and maximize learning opportunities for targeted learners

Constraints inhibiting success

In the less successful schools (whether primary or secondary) there was a lack of leadership capability to raise achievement through targeted actions. In less successful schools there were more constraints than conditions for success in place. The main constraints were the:

- > lack of depth in data gathering and evaluative reasoning
- > inadequate focus on underachievement
- > limited responsiveness in their actions for school improvement
- > lack of follow through on planned actions.

Lack of depth in data gathering and analysis

Leaders at less successful schools were constrained by either limitations in their data gathering and analysis, or their ability to think using evaluative reasoning. In some schools, data analysis did not give a clear understanding of achievement or underachievement. In other schools, leaders and trustees were unsure what the data told them about students' achievement, so they had little basis on which to plan what to do next to build educational improvement.

At some schools, no supplementary data about gender, ethnicity or specific needs were collected that allowed exploration of key variables. When data gathering and analysis lacked this depth, the variance³⁵ in patterns of outcomes between groups of students, and reasons for variance, were hidden. In some of these schools, weak moderation processes in different parts of the school were blamed by leaders for differences in outcomes that should have been explored further.

At other schools, leaders seemed to be unsure what actions had led to 2014 outcomes or there was a lack of buy-in to the planned actions from teachers. In one school, teachers saw the act of

data analysis as extra work. In another school, students did not know what the intended goal was for them personally, as teachers had not shared this. This lack of knowledge and knowledge sharing constrained any achievement gains.

Inadequate focus on underachievement

Many leaders at less successful schools defined their target by talking about the percentage of students they wanted to have achieving to a particular level. Most of these schools had modelled their annual targets on the Ministry of Education's system targets of 85 percent of students reaching NCEA Level 2 or equivalent; or 85 percent of students achieving at or above the National Standards expected for their year level. These targets are suitable at a system level but were not useful in a school setting. The targets lacked the detail of who needed to improve, and what needed to happen for the named students to make the necessary improvement. They did not help with decisions about a targeted response to underachievement at a school level.

Limited responsiveness in actions for school improvement

In planning for school improvement, boards at the less successful schools were constrained by the quality of the reports they received and their ability to rigorously scrutinise these reports. They lacked critical information about specific needs when setting targets. This limited their capacity to plan for and resource an appropriate response.

Leaders were sometimes constrained by their lack of knowledge about designing and implementing coherent whole-school plans, with targeted support for both students and teachers. Instead, their supplementary responses often involved putting less skilled teacher aides to work with students facing learning challenges, or putting in place programmes where students

35 Hattie, J. (2015). *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise*. London: Pearson. Hattie defines variance as the spread of achievement between top and bottom learners in any group taking a common assessment task.

were withdrawn from their classroom. In some instances ERO found few links to what the student was learning in the classroom and what was covered in the withdrawal programme. This lack of alignment meant students were not given the chance to embed any new skills.

Classroom teachers in less successful schools were often not responsive enough to the strengths, needs and interests of the students who were at risk of underachieving. Teachers did not know whether the students in their class were part of the 85 percent already achieving at the desired levels, or part of the 15 percent yet to achieve. Teachers and leaders failed to see themselves as a key player in addressing the disparity in their school.

Lack of follow through in less successful schools

Leaders in less successful schools often planned to do new things. For example they usually had a plan to develop learning-centred relationships with parents, families and whānau. However, they were not always strongly committed to following through with the actions required.

There were early expectations for improved partnerships with parents from regular communication and meetings. However, this has not so far been implemented as planned. Several parents spoke to ERO about the lack of communication around support for their child in relation to targeted teaching. There has not yet been a meeting for parents of targeted learners – even though the year is halfway through. This is to occur next week.
(A small, rural contributing primary school)

In some schools, teachers knew about barriers to learning, but they were not factoring this into effective actions that made a difference to learning outcomes for those at risk of underachieving.

Teachers knew from local knowledge quite a bit about their students and families. They spoke about factoring this into their understanding of children's learning. However, this information was not being used in a deliberate sense for designing teaching that supported progress. Teaching didn't change from year to year to reflect the groups of children in their class.

(A medium-sized, urban contributing primary school)

In some schools, actions were taken in classrooms and some data about progress was gathered by teachers. But leaders and trustees were unaware of whether target students were achieving acceleration or not.

Conclusions

ERO's conclusions are shaped around the four themes that distinguished successful from less successful and unsuccessful schools in targeting achievement.

The explicit commitment to equity and excellence

The most significant difference between schools that succeeded and less successful schools was the explicit commitment to both equity and excellence in successful schools. The findings show that successful schools took a range of key actions to accelerate progress for selected students, to close the achievement gap between them and other learners as a matter of **equity**.

Targeting did not mean ignoring the needs of the majority of students. At the same time as prioritising target learners, successful schools maintained a focus on the quality of the learning experience offered to other learners, so that those already achieving success sustained their path of positive learning. Successful schools continued their commitment to **excellence** by taking deliberate actions to improve the quality of teaching across the school, and by strengthening learning opportunities for all students.

The effective targeting of progression

Successful schools set effective goals and also took effective actions to accelerate learning. Their targeting demonstrated two key qualities. Goals and targets set an **optimum level of challenge** for teachers and students, by being low enough to seem achievable but high enough to make a real difference. Goals and targets also

created **maximum visibility and alignment** between the targets and objectives set, and the plans and initiatives of trustees, school leaders, teachers, students, parents and whānau. This ensured that daily actions were taken in classrooms and across the school community that supported successful learning outcomes.

Successful schools took a **series of interrelated actions** to create positive change for targeted learners. Staff teams worked to reach agreement about what one year's progress looked like in key areas of learning. They then set goals and targets to accelerate the rate of learning for students who were at risk of failing to achieve a year's progress. They designed interventions by using either internal or external expertise. They monitored the progress of target students, and modified actions where required. Together the effective goals and interrelated actions in successful schools created a commitment for improvement that people across the community bought into and felt they owned personally.

The spread of leadership

The central theme of this evaluation is leadership at the centre. ERO found that the influence of **leadership applied at multiple levels** in successful schools. Trustees, school and middle leaders defined a shared achievement challenge in terms of acceleration for target students. Trustees and school leaders strategically resourced the key actions required to make a difference. In larger schools, middle leaders led teams of teachers who put the plans into action. Leaders at all levels monitored and evaluated progress, and made adjustments to increase students' chances of success.

Leaders in successful schools connected plans and actions through effective **professional learning conversations**. Leaders played a critical role in leading these conversations. Groups of teachers needed to plan interventions with individual students' needs in mind, so that professional knowledge and expertise about what might work for acceleration of their learning could be sourced. Sometimes this expertise was sourced from elsewhere within the school, and shared through professional learning communities of teachers who worked with targeted students. In other cases this expertise was sourced from outside the school and was adapted by middle leaders responsible for in-school implementation.

Capability building for school improvement

Leaders supported efforts in their school to make ongoing improvement by deliberately building school capability. At the same time leaders were developing teaching capabilities and improving learning opportunities. To achieve this, leaders in successful schools demonstrated four key capabilities:

- > **strategic capability**, so that school plans and resources were directed to priority areas with the biggest influence on achieving equity and excellence
- > **evaluative capability**, so that the right evidence was gathered and used throughout the teaching and learning cycle, as well as in the planning and internal evaluation cycle, to make a real difference
- > **instructional capability**, so that teachers developed and applied the knowledge and skills for instruction that meet the needs of particular students, where these needs may not have been previously met
- > **adaptive capability**, so that leaders and teachers could retrieve, organise and use relevant knowledge and expertise from either internal or external sources, whenever new problems or issues arose in teaching or learning.

Capability building meant that successful schools built the key conditions that made a difference for targeted learners in 2014 into their regular practice. Capability building increased the chances that positive outcomes would be sustained in future.

Appendix 1: Sample of schools

The type and location of the 351 schools involved in this evaluation are shown in Tables 1 to 3 below.

Table 1: School type

School type	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Full Primary (Years 1–8)	150	43	43
Contributing (Years 1–6)	133	38	31
Intermediate (Years 7–10)	14	4	5
Composite (Years 1–10 and Years 1–15)	8	2	7
Secondary (Years 7–15)	41	12	14
Special School	5	1	1
Total	351	100	101³⁶

Differences not statistically significant. Table 1 shows that school type in the sample was representative of national figures.

Table 2: Location of schools

School location	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Main urban (>30,000)	186	53	55
Secondary urban (10,000–30,000)	24	7	6
Minor urban (<10,000)	28	8	12
Rural	113	32	27
Total	351	100	100

Differences are statistically significant. Table 2 shows that minor urban schools were underrepresented in the sample while rural schools were overrepresented.

³⁶ Some totals do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 3: Roll size

Roll size	Number of schools in sample	Percentage of schools in sample	National percentage of schools
Very small	33	9	13
Small	91	26	27
Medium	135	38	38
Large	74	21	18
Very Large	18	5	5
Total	351	99	101

Differences not statistically significant. Table 3 shows that roll size in the sample was representative of national figures.

Appendix 2: Methodology, evaluative framework and investigative questions

Evaluation questions

ERO investigated how well schools were setting targets for achievement and implementing actions that make the expected difference for learners, particularly for those learners at risk of underachieving. The study focused on how well school plans for improvement in achievement linked to actions that made a difference for targeted learners. The three evaluation questions were:

- > To what extent did the school meet the selected 2014 achievement target?
- > How well were the planned 2014 actions implemented and monitored?
- > How well was the 2015 target set?

Participants

All schools³⁷ reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2015 were involved in the national evaluation. The evaluation included 41 secondary schools and 296 primary schools.

In each school ERO investigated the impact of one 2014 board achievement target that focused on those students at risk of poor educational outcomes. ERO also investigated the quality of the 2015 achievement target.

Investigative themes

ERO evaluated the resulting shifts in achievement for students in the target group and the factors involved. ERO reviewers explored whether:

- > schools knew why targeting particular students was important
- > schools were targeting students most at risk of poor educational outcomes
- > teachers and leaders knew the needs, strengths and interests of the students who most needed help to make the biggest shifts
- > schools had planned actions for accelerating progress for targeted students that made a significant difference
- > teachers, the target students and their parents were all committed to the selected achievement focus
- > teachers, the target students and their parents knew what they needed to do to make the agreed improvement
- > planned actions from targets led to more effective teaching
- > the actions schools implemented led to more students experiencing success.

³⁷ See Appendix 1: Schools in this evaluation.

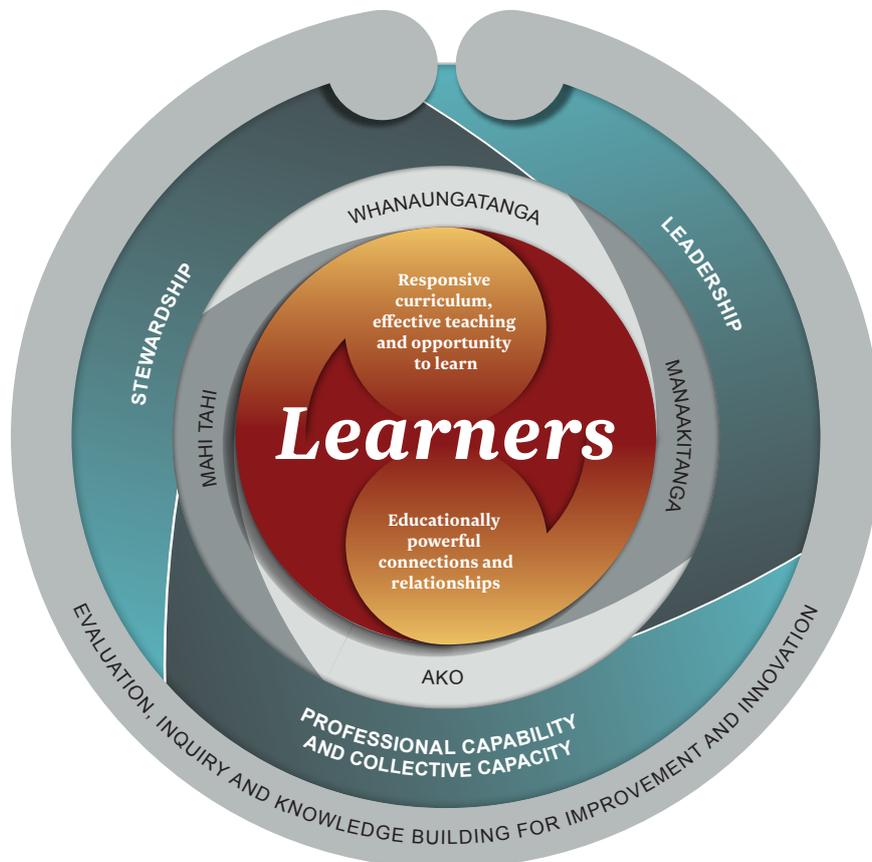
Synthesis

Key domains from ERO's 2015 *School Evaluation Indicators*³⁸ were used as follows in the final stage of the synthesis to:

- > identify overall patterns in key findings
- > frame conclusions in this report.

The key domains from ERO's 2015 *School Evaluation Indicators* referred to in figures in this report are:

- > Stewardship
- > Leadership
- > Responsive curriculum
- > Effective teaching and opportunity to learn
- > Professional capability and capacity building.



38 Education Review Office. (2015). *School Evaluation Indicators: Effective Practice for Improvement and Learner Success*. Retrieved from www.ero.govt.nz.

Appendix 3: Success with targets and actions across the sample

Three main criteria were used to judge whether schools were setting clear targets:

1. Effective scanning of achievement data to focus on underachievement
2. Targets that built on the previous year's outcomes
3. Targets that had 'buy in' from teachers and students

Table 1: Target setting for achievement in 2015

More effective target setting, defined as the target set meeting two or three of the criteria for effective targets	Less effective target setting, defined as the target set meeting none or one criterion for effective targets
School had all three criteria: 27%	School target met one criteria: 20%
School had two of the three criteria: 37%	School target met none of the criteria: 16%

Table 2: Overall school actions: planning and implementation in 2014

More effective actions, defined as having (i) a focused plan (ii) and more than 40% of students in the target group made accelerated progress	Less effective actions, defined as having no specific actions planned; or actions planned but less than 40% making accelerated progress
Actions planned and implemented resulting in more than 70% of students achieving the target 25% of schools in the sample	Actions planned and less than 40% of students accelerated: 32% of schools in the sample
Actions planned and implemented resulting in 40% to 69% of students in the target group achieving the target. 20% of schools in the sample	No specific actions planned 23% of schools in the sample

Note: 6% percent of schools were unsuccessful, with neither effective targets nor effective actions.

Appendix 4: School leadership and achievement

What we know about the influence of school leadership (MOE 2008 and 2012) ³⁹	What this evaluation suggests about the impact of leadership in schools (ERO 2015)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A school leader influences outcomes largely through her/his actions as a pedagogical leader and a shaper of school culture. These two key roles have a positive impact on the school's systems, networks and relationships. 2. Senior and middle leaders may have a positive impact by improving teaching and raising student achievement. This is especially the case when the authority for the leadership of learning is effectively distributed by a school's leader to those with expertise for the particular achievement challenges that the school is facing. 3. However, senior and middle leaders' roles are diverse. The nature and composition of teams differ greatly in different school settings, as do the types of tasks and responsibilities expected from different team leaders. Some roles offer a clear focus for the team leader and a purpose that is well understood and appreciated by the team. Other roles may have multiple purposes. As a result these team leaders can claim no clear loyalty or priority from team members. 4. Usually the clearer the team leader role and the more shared the team purpose the greater the influence a particular team leader is likely to have. However the personal attributes and qualities of the leader also have a strong influence on outcomes, particularly the level of relational trust that a specific team leader generates. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Some schools accelerated learning much more strongly than did others. Progression (with more than 50 percent of learners accelerating) was strong in over 40 percent of the primary schools but in no more than 15 percent of secondary schools. 2. In successful primary schools, school leaders influenced both pedagogy and culture positively. In successful secondary schools, school leaders played a strategic and an overseeing role, with pedagogical leadership delegated to senior or middle leaders. Sometimes new roles for specific achievement challenges were created. 3. Primary school team leaders' roles were generally well focused on accelerating the learning that made a difference. In the secondary schools where progression was strongest team leaders also had a clear focus on raising achievement, and this focus was shared with their team. Teams made the most difference in Years 7-13 schools. Teams in these schools were generally smaller than in Year 9-13 schools, where progress was generally more limited. 4. Team leaders in Year 7-13 schools focused on acceleration in Years 7 and 8 (one case) and in Years 9 and 10 (another case) and made a significant difference to learning outcomes in their school. Team leaders in Years 9-13 schools appeared to make most difference when they focused on teaching in Years 9 and 10 rather than Years 11 and 12.

39 Ministry of Education. (2008). *Kiwi Leadership for Principals*, and (2012). *Learning from the Middle*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Appendix 5: Two types of professional learning conversation

Timperley and Parr (2004)⁴⁰ outline key principles for two different but interrelated types of professional learning conversation in successful schools:

Type 1 professional learning conversation, about raising student achievement.	Type 2 professional learning conversation, about improving the quality of teaching practice.
<p>Key principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consider both curriculum expectations for progress in learning and the evidence of previous student achievement in initial planning meetings. 2. Look at improving day to day teaching activities to accelerate learning in the first instance, rather than additional or withdrawal programmes. 3. Plan to collect evidence during the intervention so that both student progress and the effectiveness of the intervention can be gauged. 4. Make early decisions about what information is important to collect, how often to collect it, and how to analyse the data. 5. The single most critical decision is about which benchmark to use to gauge progress. Make a decision about how to develop a clear benchmark and apply it during the intervention. 6. Make regular and ongoing decisions about how to interpret the emerging evidence and to plan next steps. 	<p>Key principles:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be respectful of everyone's contribution when considering current teaching practices and what might be needed for improvement. Pooling the range of viewpoints about both matters is a key entry point. 2. Maximise valid information at the problem identification stage by seeking all relevant information that is pertinent to the area of improvement that has been identified. 3. Apply an attitude of inquiry and desire to find new and more useful information that might assist improvement throughout. 4. Establish current best practice amongst the group by sharing and comparing data. This should identify the teacher or teachers who are best qualified to help and support others. 5. Source the external expertise needed to supplement the available internal expertise. 6. Keep the PLD process inclusive throughout so that activities are shared, information about impact is analysed together and key decisions are collectively made.

40 Timperley, H. and Parr, J. (2004). *Using Evidence in Teaching Practice*. Auckland: Hodder Beckett Moa. Chapters 5 and 6.



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