EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
TE TARI AROTAKE MATAURANGA

Evaluation at a Glance: What ERO Knows About Effective Schools

March 2011

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

Published March 2011

Education Evaluation Reports

ISBN 9780 478-34074-7 (pdf)
ISBN 9780 478-34083-9 (Word)
ISBN 9780 478-34084-6 (html)
ISBN 9780 478-34085-3 (pbk)

ERO reports are published on the ERO website – **www.ero.govt.nz** – and are available from the National Manager Public Affairs, Education Review Office Corporate Office, Box 2799, Wellington 6140.

We welcome your comments and suggestions on the issues raised in these reports.

Foreword

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

The Education Review Office (ERO) evaluates the quality of education and care in schools and early childhood services. It reports publicly with the aim of improving the achievement of all students. ERO also conducts evaluations of areas of national interest and publishes reports on these. *Evaluation at a Glance* is a synthesis of material from national evaluations and reports of good practice published in the last four or so years that, taken together, give a picture of what makes effective schools.

ERO's *Statement of Intent 2009* set the project in motion. "ERO will add value by undertaking system wide evaluations to inform the development and implementation of education policy and practice." *Evaluation at a Glance* is part of a strategy to meet this goal. Whereas national evaluations and reports of good practice focus on a particular topic (for example, gifted and talented students, the education of boys, or schools' readiness to implement the new curriculum), *Evaluation at a Glance* draws on key findings from these individual ERO reports to comment on broader educational issues.

Evaluation at a Glance: What ERO Knows About Effective Schools is the first in a series and it highlights five themes that emerge from ERO's evaluations in primary and secondary schools. Later reports in this series will look more closely at each of the primary and secondary sectors individually, early childhood education services, education for Māori students, students at risk of failure in the education system, and other topics as they arise.

These reports will contribute to the growing body of knowledge from research, evaluation and practice that is used to inform educational decision-making. They will be available on ERO's website www.ero.govt.nz.

Graham Stoop
Chief Review Officer

March 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary

Regardless of type, location, decile rating or philosophy, schools provide high quality education when they make evidence-based and thoughtful decisions.

Good schools focus on the potential of learners through a careful analysis of needs, progress and achievement

A school-wide approach is taken to raising achievement for all students. Appropriate and timely assessment pinpoints learners' needs and their next learning steps; evidence-based decisions are made about curriculum, teaching strategies and interventions; programmes and resources are carefully selected and evaluated; learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning; progress is monitored and achievement is communicated clearly.

Leadership is promoted in an inclusive culture

Effective school leadership begins with the principal but goes beyond to the recognition that all those in leadership, management and governance have roles to play. These roles are defined clearly and grounded in shared visions, values and expectations. Leaders are supported in developing the skills needed for the tasks they undertake. They set the tone for the school culture and build respectful relationships. Leaders celebrate diversity and model culturally appropriate, inclusive ways of operating. They work in partnership with and offer leadership opportunities to staff, students, parents, whānau and people in the broader education community.

School decisions enhance effective teaching

Effective teachers are committed to providing high quality education for all their learners. They treat children and young people as individuals, positively acknowledging their differences and building collaborative learning relationships. Teachers set high yet attainable expectations, providing learning-rich programmes that respond to learner needs and interests. Effective teachers differentiate the curriculum as needed and engage learners in purposeful learning through a range of media and resources. Teachers are encouraged to undertake professional learning and strengthen their pedagogical content knowledge.

Good schools engage with their communities

Effective schools listen to the aspirations that parents and whānau have for their children. They consult them on relevant matters and communicate with them in a timely and appropriate manner. Teachers and support staff are approachable and knowledgeable. Teachers are willing to talk about their realistic appraisal of learner potential and progress. Effective schools value communication as a two-way experience. They also make use of agencies, organisations, resources and personnel in the wider community to enhance students' educational and social outcomes.

Effective schools implement policies and practice in a cycle of continuous self review

A feature of effective schools is that all aspects of their operations are aligned and consistent with the agreed values, aims and priorities. Thoughtful decision-making is evident from the board of trustees, through school managers and personnel, to each individual learner and group of learners. There are high levels of respect, trust, transparency and "joined-up thinking". Systems and processes are coherent, logical and expressed clearly. Decisions are made in a cycle of continuous self review and critical reflection. External critique is welcomed, considered and built into planning and decision-making.

Introduction

As well as undertaking the education reviews of schools and early childhood services, ERO produces broader evaluative information on significant educational issues and publishes reports on education sector performance and good practice. This information is used by education agencies and policy makers to determine the effectiveness of current initiatives and to establish future priorities. ERO's national evaluations and reports of good practice are also made available to schools, sector groups, parents, communities and professionals in the wider field of education to raise their awareness of education issues and practice. Schools find the reports and the appendices useful in planning and implementing their own self review.

An analysis of the content and findings from over 30 national evaluations and reports of good practice published between 2007 and 2010, where the focus was on schools and school related matters, highlighted some key characteristics of effective schools. These were consistent across reports whether the focus of the evaluation was on a curriculum area, the implementation of a new policy initiative, the provision of a particular service or a general area of interest.

Reports throughout this time have focused on topics as broad as operational funding, assessment, mathematics teaching, bullying, Māori student achievement, gifted and talented students, career guidance, health and physical education, students at risk of not achieving, boys' education, social studies, and engagement with families, whānau and communities (see the references for the full list). While we acknowledge that the national evaluations of the last four years have not covered every element of school policies, programmes and practice, the picture that they produce of what makes an effective school are consistent with current research and recent best-evidence syntheses.

The five characteristics that crossed the boundaries of school type, location, decile rating and philosophy were:

- *a focus on the learner*
- *inclusive leadership*
- *effective teaching*
- *engaged communities*
- *coherent policies and practice as part of continuous self review.*

Of course these five characteristics do not exist in isolation from each other but play out in an interconnected web that is the complexity of everyday activity in a school setting. They are discussed individually in this report for the sake of clarity.

Schools may like to use the information in this report to examine their own practice and policies. Further information can be found in each individual national evaluation listed in the references. All are available on request from info@ero.govt.nz or on www.ero.govt.nz.

This synthesis also informs *ERO's Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews* (2011a) and the *Framework for School Reviews* (2011b).

This synthesis is structured on the five key characteristics of effective schools with important ideas and summaries drawn from relevant national evaluations. Real life examples and case studies supplement the synthesis to make it a practical tool for professional reading and discussion. Full references are given so that readers can find out more about each idea or example from the original report.

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

Topics for investigation through national evaluations arise from issues signalled in ERO's education reviews of individual schools, from discussions with the Minister of Education and the Minister responsible for the Education Review Office, the Ministry of Education, and from suggestions made by education sector groups or agencies in regular liaison meetings.

In general, the collection and analysis of data for national evaluations follows several parallel steps. The project leader establishes a reference group (ERO reviewers with expertise or interest in the topic and, where relevant, representatives of relevant stakeholder groups with expertise or interest in the topic) to provide direction for the project plan. At the same time, a literature search is undertaken to ascertain what information ERO might have collected in the past on this topic, what other researchers or agencies have found, and what the key issues might be.

A set of evaluative questions and tools is developed from the literature review or from a particularly relevant source. For the *Managing Professional Development and Learning* evaluations (ERO, 2009a & b), for example, a set of questions and an indicator framework were based on the recent *Best Evidence Synthesis* on teacher professional development.

The data collection is then either done as an adjunct to regular education reviews in schools or a by specialist team. If it is done as part of a regular review, then training for reviewers is held in all the regional offices to ensure that those collecting the data understand the purpose of the evaluation and can use the data gathering tools (questionnaires, interview schedules and/or document analysis guides) effectively. Once collected, original data is then transferred to synthesis sheets using the evaluation questions as a guide. From there the collated data is analysed using NVivo or other analytic tools to draw out key themes and compile the report.

When the data are collected as part of a series of regular reviews, these are undertaken throughout one or two consecutive school terms. In this way, a large and representative sample can be assured. For example, when compiling *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* report (2007a), data were collected from 314 schools which matched the national profile for school type, size, location and decile rating. *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities* (2008a) used data from 233 school reviews, plus over 300 meetings with parents at those schools (more than 3000 parents), 34 broader community discussion groups (a further 235 parents), and up to 700 individual discussions, phone surveys or electronic communications. A further 500 parents responded anonymously to a web-based survey.

When conducted by a specialist team (as is the case with reports of good practice), other criteria would be used to select schools for relevant case studies. In the case of the report *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* (2008g), the 10 schools (five boys' and five coeducational) were selected in consultation with the Ministry of Education following on from the work done by its reference group on boys' education. These schools also needed to have a positive ERO reporting history, high levels of student achievement, good practice in pastoral care, and to represent the range of socio-economic, cultural and geographical features that were known to impact on boys' achievement.

The compilation of this *Evaluation at a Glance: What ERO Knows About Effective Schools* synthesis is an analysis of 36 national evaluations and reports of good practice completed between 2007 and 2010. The analysis used both electronic (NVivo) and paper-based (constant comparative analysis) methods to produce five characteristics of effective schools.

Although it could be argued that these findings were the only possible outcomes given ERO's focus and the questions asked, the evaluations were flexible enough to highlight matters that might fall outside the indicator rubrics, and as the questions were evaluative rather than descriptive, they allowed ERO to investigate 'to what extent' these factors were deemed relevant and important. It was through this flexibility that the themes of coherence and consistency between policy and practice, for example, appeared as such a strong feature.

That the five characteristics resonate with recent national and international research, including those produced as part of the Ministry of Education's *Best Evidence Synthesis Programme*, lends credibility to this analysis. This report places these characteristics in the context of what ERO can contribute through its unique ability to see first hand what is happening in every school in the country.

Effective schools

A FOCUS ON THE LEARNER

Introduction

The strongest theme to come through the analysis of all the reports was the focus on meeting learners' potential through a careful analysis of their needs, progress and achievement. In effective schools this was coordinated through a school-wide approach to raising achievement for *all* students.

Appropriate and timely assessment practices were paramount. They pinpointed learner needs and next learning steps. Collaborative and evidence-based decisions were made about curriculum, teaching strategies and interventions. Programmes and resources were carefully selected and evaluated. A self-reflective culture permeated the schools where teachers constantly monitored their success with students. Learners were encouraged to take responsibility for their own goal setting and learning. Engagement, achievement and progress were effectively monitored and clearly communicated to students, their parents and whānau as well as being aggregated and fed back into strategic planning and decision-making processes.

A school-wide approach

ERO's national evaluations and reports of good practice showed that effective schools made a commitment to a school-wide approach to raising student achievement and providing successful learning experiences for all their students. When ERO first investigated *Schools' Readiness to Implement the New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2009e), it found that effective school-wide involvement resulted in better alignment with the school's strategic goals and a better shared understanding of the curriculum at the classroom level.

When collecting data for *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* (ERO, 2007a), in the schools where effective practice was observed ERO noted that staff had worked together to develop school-wide expectations and goals for students, based on aggregated and analysed student achievement data. The expectations and goals set by the teachers were then meaningful and specific. They focused on educationally significant learning and were challenging enough to raise all students' achievement. Where appropriate, there were close links between nationally referenced standards of achievement and the school's expectations for students.

The Collection and Use of Assessment: Good Practice in Secondary Schools report (ERO, 2007c) highlighted that schools demonstrating good practice had clear guidelines and school wide agreement about assessment practices across learning programmes.

They had developed and used existing tools to assess student progress and achievement in all curriculum areas, not just literacy and numeracy. The analysis of moderated school-wide data provided information about patterns and trends in students' progress and achievement.

A good practice school was described as follows:

> *The board of trustees developed high quality strategic plans that linked to detailed school-wide guidelines about the purpose of assessment. The board articulated its commitment to excellent teaching and academic success, and was supported by a clear direction for implementation of all operational areas that had an impact on student achievement. Specific data-based goals defined actions, responsibilities and performance indicators that provided a sound basis for monitoring progress* (ERO, 2007c: p.8).

School-wide processes also need to align with faculty/department/syndicate and class approaches. This description of practice in another secondary school appears in *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools:*

> *Teachers are provided with clear school-wide expectations for student learning. The guidelines for departments are comprehensive and detailed. They detail procedures for departments for identifying barriers to learning and suggestions for developing strategies to address these barriers* (ERO, 2007a: p.14).

This was also a key theme in *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* which outlined that school-wide approaches are effective when:

> *…school leaders carefully decide the data they will collect, the assessment tools they will use, and how and when they will collate and report the data. They also agree on performance expectations for their children. Using reference points at different stages or year levels allows them to see whether individuals and groups of children are on track to meet these expectations. Careful scrutiny of collated information also allows teachers, school leaders and boards to decide where to put their resources to ensure that children at risk of not achieving have the support to succeed* (ERO, 2009d: p.34).

Various ERO national evaluations have examined how schools provide for their diverse groups of students. In *Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of Not Achieving* (ERO, 2008e) ERO found that effective schools were well led, with the principal and senior leaders taking a key role in setting direction and providing cohesion for the school's approach. These schools had well-coordinated systems that enabled support to be targeted to those students most at risk. The most successful initiatives were inclusive and culturally relevant, and most often undertaken in the student's regular classroom.

In *Schools' Provision for Gifted and Talented Students* (ERO, 2008f) school coordinators and their teams ensured that policies were implemented across all year levels. They were supported by the school's board of trustees and senior management teams. The teams met regularly and discussed the needs of students with their teachers. Good practice was characterised by strong coordination of programmes, adequate resourcing and a shared understanding of gifted and talented education.

A note of caution was issued, however:

> *Even when good policies and practices were in place, if a strong school-wide understanding was missing in the school and its community it was hard for leaders to maintain good practices"* (ERO, 2008f: p.8).

Learner engagement

In the pilot report, *Progress in Pacific Student Achievement: A Pilot Evaluation of Auckland Schools* (ERO, 2009c), the term engagement is defined as encompassing a web of closely connected factors and processes that combine to produce conditions where students are motivated to learn and achieve. Indicators of student engagement relate to factors associated with high quality teaching and assessment, students' involvement in their learning, student morale, perceptions about school, participation in decision-making, attitudes to school, and behaviour. The levels of absenteeism, truancy, stand-downs and suspensions may also indicate the degree of lack of engagement.

As well as analysing profiles of their learners, effective schools find ways to engage and motivate them all. In *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* (ERO, 2008g), ERO found that creating an atmosphere of belonging where boys felt connected to the traditions, events, staff and other students was important. In turn, a sense of belonging enabled boys to commit to life at the school and to value their involvement in learning, sporting and cultural activities. A key to boys' achievement was found to be having them attending and engaged in learning while at school. Attendance was not about just being present; engagement and achievement were influenced by the opportunities available to the boys and the quality of student-teacher relationships. The development and maintenance of good quality relationships was linked to the quality of leadership decisions, the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and the school's espoused and enacted values.

Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students (ERO, 2008d) explained that the factors affecting student presence, engagement and achievement were both internal and external. Internal school factors were the quality of teaching that students experienced, the breadth of opportunities they had to demonstrate success, and the extent to which they felt connected to their school and supported by it. External factors were peer relationships, family support and expectations, and the availability of employment and training opportunities post-school.

In Promoting Success for Māori Students: Schools' Progress (ERO, 2010f), ERO describes a decile 3 secondary school that is engaging its Māori students:

> *The focus of school-wide professional development is on engaging students more actively by making processes explicit and improving students' understanding of their own learning. In classrooms where teachers focus on having positive relationships with students and providing student-centred learning experiences, students are highly engaged in the learning process* (ERO, 2010f: p.19).

Strategies for engaging students can vary from those that work for individuals, to those that are best for different groups, classes or cohorts.

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 gives an example of motivating young writers at the classroom level:

> *Good classroom management made time available for teachers to support individual writers. They managed time with small groups of children who needed additional help or extension. Teachers roved around the class reinforcing children's success with the language features or writing skills focused on in the lesson. They had conversations with individual children to help them further refine or expand their ideas, help them edit their work, and highlight their success and progress* (ERO, 2009d: p.30).

Engagement strategies can also vary across curriculum areas. Schools in which students were engaged and motivated to achieve highly in mathematics (ERO, 2007g) used the following range of strategies. They:

- provided learning experiences where concepts could be practically applied and the learning was related to everyday settings
- involved the students in a range of activities including individual, paired, small group or whole class activities
- used a range of materials and resources that were appropriate to the ages and abilities of the students in the classroom
- maximised teaching and learning times
- provided opportunities for students to discuss their learning, to question, and to share problem solving ideas and strategies with the teacher and one another
- encouraged positive and supportive relationships amongst teachers and students
- promoted attitudes of respect for each other – modelled by teachers and evident amongst the students
- encouraged risk taking in learning mathematics in the class.

Analysis and diagnosis

The careful analysis of student achievement data is key to developing effective teaching and learning activities. By analysing student achievement information, schools are able to identify how well their students are achieving and also how student engagement, learning and progress could be improved. To achieve this aim, for example, one secondary school, cited in *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d), used software to track added value in the education of their students as well as to make predictions about student performance. Where students were not performing as well as predicted, the school was able to undertake a closer analysis of student performance and intervene as required.

Good classroom assessment and needs analysis is the first point of intervention for most students at risk of not achieving. In *Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of Not Achieving* (ERO, 2008e), ERO reminds us that student achievement information is of most use when school leaders and classroom teachers analyse data to identify the particular learning needs of students and determine what will work best to improve achievement for individuals and groups of students.

In about half the schools evaluated in *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools study* (ERO, 2007a), teachers used assessment information to inform their teaching and learning programmes but less than half used worthwhile information to give an accurate picture of students across the school, and many schools did not use the information gathered about students' achievement to identify groups of students who needed extra assistance.

In *The Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes: Good Practice* (ERO, 2007i) report, ERO identified schools as having effective practices for identifying the full range of student needs and interests where there was evidence that:

- schools identified student needs based on current, valid assessment information
- specific, achievable and measurable learning outcomes were articulated for students
- transition goals and activities aimed at achieving a smooth transition from one setting to another were outlined for each student
- information about the student's progress informed future needs assessment and decision-making
- the student achievement information collected was of a consistently high standard.

In its recent report on the implementation of national standards in primary schools (*Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum,* ERO, 2010a), ERO found that teachers benefited from discussions about patterns and trends identified from the collation and analysis of school-wide achievement information. Teachers were then able to look at school-wide data and reflect on the implications for their practice.

Similar strategies were discussed in *Promoting success for Māori students: Schools' Progress:*

> *Schools that had high quality information tended to collect data from a range of sources over time, analyse it for individuals and groups, identify trends and patterns, and use it to make appropriate responses to what they knew about the learning needs of Māori students* (ERO, 2010f: p.26).

Where analysis and diagnosis were built into lesson, unit and programme planning, they provided momentum for moving forward. In this excerpt from *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* a sense of urgency and excitement is evident:

> *Lessons and activities were based on the diagnosed needs of individuals and groups of children. Lead teachers and/or school leaders shared and discussed ideas, instances and effective strategies. They read literature about best teaching practice and discussed these aspects together. Teachers with reading expertise modelled effective practice and mentored colleagues to develop their confidence in using an increasing set of teaching strategies. Many teachers were highly enthusiastic and displayed a sense of excitement about reading. They combined approaches, such as whole language, emphasising meaning and strategy instruction, and phonics-based methods of teaching to cater for their children's diverse needs. They decided on the appropriateness of their method of teaching based on their diagnoses of children's needs* (ERO, 2009d: p.16).

Assessment practice

The assessment of student achievement and examining information about what students know and can do is fundamental to effective teaching and learning. In *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* (ERO, 2007a), ERO found that when schools implemented assessment practices effectively all teachers consistently understood the purposes of assessment activities and how the information could be best used. Strong school wide assessment practices resulted in activities that were well integrated into teaching and learning programmes and these reflected the priorities identified by the school.

To increase the effectiveness of assessment practices in schools this report recommended:

- developing and establishing school-wide agreement about the purpose and practice of assessment across all learning programmes
- reviewing the collection and analysis of student achievement information to make sure that the information collected is worthwhile, reflects the priorities of the school and accurately demonstrates students' achievements and progress

- using and interpreting both formative and summative information to determine how and when to respond to students' needs; evaluate and improve teaching programmes; and develop suitable achievement expectations for individual students, groups of students and the whole schools
- engaging more effectively with their families and communities about students' progress and achievement.

Effective school-wide assessment practice noted in *Promoting Success for Māori Students: Schools' Progress* (ERO, 2010f) included:

- clearly expressed school-wide guidelines for assessment that direct teachers to gather information from a range of sources over time
- information that shows Māori students' improvement and progress over time compared to nationally benchmarked assessments
- comprehensive board reports that provide comparisons of progress over time
- analyses of information on significant trends and patterns
- assessment analyses contributing to resourcing and teaching decisions
- assessment analyses giving regard to Māori students in the bi-lingual unit as well as mainstream classes.

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 (ERO, 2009d) explains that classroom teachers use different ways to collect information about how well their children are doing.

Sometimes this is informal and constructive in supporting immediate learning needs. Most often it is planned and systematic. To be effective, teachers need to be clear about which assessment tools they need, and how they can best use these to help them plan for, and monitor, children's achievement and progress.

This evaluation found that the majority of teachers were good at using assessment to reflect on and improve their teaching of reading and writing. These teachers were adept at using a variety of assessment sources to make judgements about children's literacy progress and achievement. They also applied a 'teaching as inquiry' process to find out what children had already learnt and what changes to make to their teaching, based on what children needed to learn next.

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 (ERO, 2009d) also showed that in effective schools teachers worked together to discuss achievement data and to reflect on how well children were progressing. These regular discussions, as a team or whole-school staff, helped them identify rates of progress and examine and share the teaching practices used to bring about improvements. Formal team or syndicate reflection also helped teachers focus on children needing extra support or to highlight the need to modify aspects of the teaching programme.

In the report on the implementation of national standards in primary schools (*Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum,* ERO, 2010a), ERO found that where assessment data was well understood, it was used to:

- discuss student progress with other teachers in teams or syndicates
- moderate teacher judgements
- monitor students' progress
- identify teaching strategies for individuals or groups of students
- involve students in goal setting and deciding their next learning steps
- monitor the progress of students in relation to school targets
- share information with parents and whānau
- identify professional development priorities
- critique and reflect on teaching practice.

Moderation of teacher judgements has become a significant feature of good assessment practices. *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* study (ERO, 2007a) found that secondary schools were generally more effective at establishing and implementing moderation processes than primary. Where moderation was done well, it was a little time-consuming but the benefits to student learning outweighed the disadvantages.

Here are descriptions of the processes in two schools:

> *Secondary school*
> *In the junior school most departments discuss content and processes involved in assessment tasks. In general, teachers in charge of a particular assessment activity mark a few scripts and then meet with others to confirm the judgements. Random scripts are shared among other markers for consistency in marking and a panel will meet in order to give a judgement on borderline decisions. Any further variations in marking are refereed to the Head of Department. Reports from the moderation of NQF standards are discussed in the department and any differences reviewed.*
>
> *Primary school*
> *The teachers use national exemplars and school-developed exemplars when making decisions about students' levels of achievement. They meet regularly to moderate their work. They plan very carefully what will be assessed and how the assessment will be carried out to achieve consistency* (ERO, 2007a: p.15).

Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum stated, *"Moderation was most successful when it took place in a culture of school self review that included regular professional learning conversations about assessment data* (ERO, 2010a: p.10)."

This report also outlined the challenges that primary schools were still facing with moderation. They needed to become more familiar with the range of assessment tools available and how these might align to the curriculum and the standards, to access suitable professional development and to engage in moderation beyond their own schools.

Evidence-based decision-making

Effective schools make thoughtful decisions based on a range of telling evidence. These schools gather data using both quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (narrative) methods. The data are analysed carefully for what is and isn't obvious. Further data are gathered if necessary to provide a more detailed picture. Data analysis includes establishing what is significant, what is working well and what isn't, how groups or cohorts compare, what patterns or trends are showing up, and whether improvement or progress is apparent. The findings are integrated into decision-making processes which include prioritising, evaluating possible interventions or programmes, action planning and deciding on success criteria. These two examples are from *Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies* (ERO, 2007h):

> *The principal used extensive qualitative and quantitative data to help trustees make funding decisions. She monitored and evaluated school initiatives to improve the learning of students. The principal encouraged teachers to make effective use of assessment information to set priorities and evaluate learning programmes. The teachers analysed student achievement results, particularly in literacy and mathematics, and had a good understanding of how well students were learning. They were aware of national achievement expectations and reported to the board and parents against these expectations* (ERO, 2007h: p.16).

> *The board and senior managers use evidence to inform their decision-making, set their priorities in terms of student achievement and student and staff welfare, monitor how they're doing, and have good personal relationships in the school and the community. These practices stand them in good stead when there are difficulties. They are prepared to try things and are not defeated if they don't produce the desired result* (ERO, 2007h: p.13).

The second *Readiness to Implement The New Zealand Curriculum* report (ERO, August, 2009f) explained that, as an integral part of finding out what worked and what did not, effective schools collected evidence regularly to contribute to decisions about changes to their practice. This focus on review and inquiry helped school leaders establish where they needed to put their resources and what steps they needed to take to improve systems and their practices.

Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students (ERO, 2008d) says that using data positively was the foundation of good quality decision-making, not only by senior staff members but also by board members, department and faculty staff, and pastoral staff. The report continues, *"Staff needed to be able to engage in conversations about student presence, engagement and achievement based on real information not intuition"* (ERO, 2008d: p.21).

The report on *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2010a), outlines the challenges that schools were still facing, including:

- making better use of information to target and support specific groups of students
- improving school leader and teacher capability to analyse and interpret data
- making good use of data beyond target setting
- using data to evaluate specific strategies and initiatives
- increasing the use of student achievement information as part of ongoing self review.

Curriculum implementation

Effective schools design and implement their curriculum programmes in a variety of ways. The first report on *Readiness to implement The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2009e) outlines the factors demonstrated by schools that were well advanced in their curriculum design and implementation. In these schools the process was well-led and clearly communicated. Each school had developed a shared common understanding of *The New Zealand Curriculum* and how it related to their own context. There was a planned approach to implementation and good use was made of external facilitation and professional development. The report uses several school case studies. Here are excerpts from two of these:

> *School B is a decile 6 coeducational secondary school with 1700 students, in a provincial town. This school was well advanced with designing a curriculum that reflected its values and the key competencies. Faculty heads and teachers were learning about the principles involved in curriculum development. They were invited to contribute to a school-based formulation of curriculum principles, and saw their immediate priority as feeding this back to the whole staff.*
>
> *Having confirmed school-wide understanding of the curriculum, the school saw its next steps as having department staff integrate the key competencies into their management and guidance procedures. This included deciding how to assess and report students' acquisition of these competencies. The 2009 focus was marrying learning areas with current subject curricula. Departments will weave the key competencies and values into their teaching programmes, applying the principles of curriculum development* (ERO, 2009e: p.8).

> *School D is a decile 1 intermediate school with 470 students, mainly of Pacific descent, in particular Samoan. Having completed the review processes, the school was at the stage of designing a curriculum framework encompassing the agreed vision, values and key competencies. These elements were integrated into each learning area, using the principles as a basis. The school had made a good start on designing a school-based curriculum with a more integrated approach to teaching and learning. The school planned to meet with its Pacific and Māori communities separately. This was their immediate priority following the review process. They wanted their consultation process to be an opportunity for parents and the community to have a say in the school's visions and values* (ERO, 2009e: p.16).

In *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2010a) ERO reports that schools with effective curriculum implementation had:

- well-developed and ongoing self review
- undertaken extensive consultation with the school community
- clearly articulated and embedded *The New Zealand Curriculum* principles, values, vision and key competencies in their own curriculum
- worked collaboratively to ensure shared understandings and ownership of curriculum decisions
- aligned assessment practices.

In schools where highly effective mathematics programmes were observed (*The Teaching of Mathematics: Good Practice,* ERO, 2007g), the classroom curriculum was supported by useful guidelines that had been developed by the school. All teachers used these guidelines in planning and delivering their programmes.

The guidelines:

- outlined the sequence and progression of learning through the Year levels
- provided teachers with clear guidance on planning, delivery and assessment of mathematics
- identified the expected outcomes of the learning programme and achievements of students
- had links to the national curriculum statement for mathematics
- had been developed by teachers in a collaborative process.

The second report on *Readiness to implement The New Zealand Curriculum* highlighted the importance of curriculum leadership:

> *The quality of curriculum leadership continues to be a critical factor in schools' readiness for or lack of progress towards implementation. Whether leadership is provided by the principal or a delegated senior leader, it is essential that teachers, students, parents and the school community in general, are well informed, clear about what the changes mean and have opportunities to express their opinions and ideas. Effective change management is integral to ensuring that schools design and implement a curriculum that is tailored to their particular vision and values, and to the identified needs of their students* (ERO, 2009f: p.13).

Programme and resource selection

A range of national evaluation reports have focused on curriculum areas and provided useful information on effective programme selection and resource allocation across the curriculum. In *The teaching of sexuality in Years 7 to 13: Good Practice* (ERO, 2007m) it was suggested that appropriate resources for this curriculum area should:

- provide for a range of student abilities
- allow for the application and extension of student skills
- reflect the New Zealand cultural mix
- acknowledge diverse sexual orientations and gender identities
- be visually attractive; have clear instructions
- facilitate independent and cooperative work
- have learning activities and outcomes that are consistent with the achievement objectives.

One case study in this report was described this way:

> *The school had up-to-date and relevant resources. Teachers made effective use of the resources and adapted the wording and scenarios to meet the needs of the students. Teachers developed a good range of their own resources and made effective use of media articles to highlight topical social concerns and used these to stimulate discussion* (ERO 2007m: p.9).

In *Teaching of Mathematics: Good Practice* one school showed how resource allocation was part of the wider strategic planning:

> *The provision and accessibility of mathematics resources were priorities for the school. The Parent Teacher Association had allocated a considerable proportion of their fundraising from the last two years to the purchase of mathematics resources. The principal had synchronised the provision of teacher professional development, the implementation for managing mathematics resources, and the stocktake and purchase of new resources, so that the teachers were able to make the best use of their resources* (ERO, 2007g: p.7).

Schools making effective use of the ongoing and reviewable resourcing schemes to support students with special education needs (ERO, 2007i), used service agreements or similar documents to provide programmes and allocate resources appropriately, as in this example:

> *IEPs were used as the basis for allocating resources to student programmes. IEPs identified the resources and services each student received as part of their learning programme. Decisions about staffing and equipment were made collaboratively in IEP meetings and clearly linked to IEP priority outcomes, and outlined in the service agreements for each student* (ERO, 2007i: p.11).

This next example is of how school-wide self review can inform resource decision-making. It is from *Schools' Use of Operational Funding:*

> *The principal led regular reviews of all curriculum areas. The findings of these reviews were used for planning and making financial decisions. For example, a review of learning outcomes in technology identified that students were not achieving well. The board responded by providing additional funds for teaching resources and professional development* (ERO, 2007h: p.21).

Making good use of staffing is another way effective schools manage their resources. In *The Teaching of Writing: Good Practice in Years 4 and 8,* one of the school case studies is described:

> *The principal was innovative and strategic in his use of staffing. He had reorganised his senior management structure to provide non-contact time for team leaders and to provide mentoring where teachers could work alongside a teacher who was knowledgeable in current teaching strategies. In this way, classroom teachers were more effective in their own teaching of writing* (ERO, 2007f: p.7).

Timetabling is a further way of making the best use of resources and allocating staff. In *Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Health and Physical Education* (ERO, 2007p) schools reported that their students participated in planned physical activities five days a week. This typically included 15 minute energising sessions, usually at the start of each day, as well as twice weekly lessons focused on movement concepts and motor skills lasting between 30 and 50 minutes. This ensured that students had regular opportunities for physical activity and the best use was made of physical resources and staff time and expertise.

This final example from *Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies* (ERO, 2007h) outlines how one secondary school used evidence-based decision-making to make difficult resourcing decisions:

> *This school needed to make reductions to its budget because of a significant deficit from the previous budget year. The board also needed to link its strategic and financial planning. As a first step, trustees developed a strategic plan and annual budget in conjunction with one another. The trustees agreed that cuts would not be made to teaching and learning. This commitment was consistent with the strategic plan's focus on student achievement. The school then identified the fixed costs for each department. The remaining funds were then allocated to projects according to evidence-based student achievement data, maintaining the strategic commitment to teaching and learning* (ERO, 2007h: p.9).

Learners' responsibility

Recognition of the role of learners in understanding how best they learn, in determining their learning pathways and in taking responsibility for setting and achieving their own goals, is a feature of highly effective schools.

> *A particular feature of this school was the students' assessment of their own work and progress. The teachers taught their students a variety of self-assessment practices. During a mathematics lesson, students recorded their perspective on their progress using a written 'thumbs up, thumbs sideways or thumbs down' system. The teacher used this information to identify any learning difficulties for individual students, small groups or the whole class. At the end of a mathematics unit of work, students assessed their progress again. They did this by ticking 'introduced', 'understand' and 'can apply' categories. This information, with the teachers' own records, was used for future planning* (ERO, 2007g: p.14).

> *ERO found that students had their own expectations about writing, and knew that they would be in appropriate writing groups. They had their own individual learning goals written in student-friendly language and were able to articulate what these learning goals meant and the desired outcomes* (ERO, 2007e: p.49).

The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools (ERO, 2007a) also outlines the importance of students taking responsibility for their own learning and decision-making but says that this works best in a supportive environment where students learn in constructive and positive ways, and celebrate their own and others' endeavours.

This report also highlighted the school's responsibility in keeping students well-informed about their achievement, progress and next learning steps so they were equipped to make decisions about their future learning. This required schools to undertake good quality formative assessment, ensure that students understood the purpose of their learning and the success criteria for the learning activities, and to engage students in rich conversations about their learning.

Despite the fact that formative assessment and involving students in making their own learning decisions has been a professional learning focus for some time, the report on *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2010a), found that only 30 per cent of primary schools had well-established practices. When schools did involve students in their learning, it was evident in:

- student-led conferences with teachers, parents and whānau
- regular self assessment and peer assessment built into learning programmes
- teaches sharing assessment data with students
- students regularly reviewing their goals with peers, teachers and parents
- student portfolios providing evidence of progress towards and achievement of learning goals
- teachers sharing learning intentions, exemplars and success criteria with students.

Monitoring progress and achievement

The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools (ERO, 2007a) considers that assessment information should be comprehensive enough to provide information on what students have achieved and the progress they have made over time. ERO found that in many schools teachers were investing time and energy in assessment activities that did not always result in useful information about students' achievement and progress.

In *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* (ERO, 2009d) ERO said that, in effective schools, teachers worked together, across the school or in clusters with other schools, to analyse work samples critically. Assessments were analysed to identify what children had mastered and what their next learning steps would be. The information was also used to identify and group together children with similar learning needs. Team, school or cluster meetings gave teachers time to reflect on and discuss practices that encouraged children to make progress. Teachers met regularly to moderate each others' professional judgements about children's work samples. Moderation of samples gave teachers useful opportunities to talk about different ways children develop and stages they move through.

According to *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* (ERO, 2007a) many schools did not make effective use of student achievement information to identify groups that needed extra assistance. The report explained that it is unrealistic to identify and monitor every aspect of diversity in a school but that there are groups whose achievement should be closely observed. These included:

- students whose assessment information shows they may not be achieving to their full potential
- groups of students (particular to each school's differing contexts and communities) that make up a significant proportion of the schools roll
- groups of students who have comparatively low success rates nationally.

In *The Teaching of Mathematics: Good Practice* (ERO, 2007g), the following school case study highlights how one school has monitored the progress of a range of student groups:

> *…teachers monitored the progress of their students. They assessed student achievement in mathematics regularly and used this information to identify the next learning steps for each student and to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning strategies. Mathematics records showed that most students were making progress.*
>
> Māori students
> *The teachers had identified the Māori students in their classes and were monitoring their ongoing progress and achievement over time. The assessment information showed that, by the end of their third year at school, Māori students were achieving at levels comparable to their peers. Information gathered by teachers as part of the monitoring process also identified the Māori students that needed additional learning support and those that required extension in gifted and talented programmes.*
>
> Pacific students
> *The number of Pacific students in the school was small. However, teachers had collated and analysed Pacific student achievement data, attendance, and information about their interests and enjoyment of learning. This information was reported to the board of trustees and was used by the board to make decisions about resources and programme initiatives. Where needed, Pacific students received extra support or extension for their learning in mathematics.*
>
> Students with special learning needs in mathematics
> *Ongoing assessment of student achievement in mathematics helped teachers to identify students with special learning needs and to support these students. For some students, this involved working individually with teachers in the classroom. Other students received individual help from a teacher aide. The classroom teachers planned the students' learning programmes and worked with the teacher aide to implement the programmes. The teachers and the teacher aide interpreted the students' achievement to determine future learning steps.*

Students achieving highly in mathematics

Teachers used grouping across classes to provide appropriate learning opportunities for students who were achieving highly in mathematics. This meant that high achievers were grouped with students of similar ability, irrespective of chronological age. The grouping of these students was fluid – that is, the groups were continually changing in response to students' changing learning needs or the topic or strand of mathematics being taught (ERO, 2007g: p.9).

Communicating results

Effective schools communicate results to students, other staff, parents and the community in timely and appropriate ways. *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools ERO* (2007a) explained that where this was working well, teaching activities were linked to assessment activities and to the school's knowledge of the students' interests, needs and abilities.

In effective schools described in this report, students were given constructive reporting of results and developmental feedback in a variety of ways, such as:

- discussing learning and achievement with students – individually, with groups of students or with the whole class
- involving students in discussions and decisions about the assessment activities and purposes
- helping students identify strategies that would help them close any gap between their performance and the expected standard
- providing feedback information (oral and written as appropriate) for some work samples that showed the student what they had done well and how they could improve
- ensuring students were clear about what test scores, grades or marks meant and how they could use the information for future learning

Partners in learning: Schools Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities (ERO, 2008a) states that most parents wanted honest, accurate and timely information about their child's achievement. In *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* (ERO, 2007a), however, ERO says that only about half the schools evaluated were reporting achievement information effectively to parents and the community.

In schools where partnerships with parents and whānau worked well, communication played a key role. Parents interviewed for *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities* (ERO, 2008a) spoke positively about schools that had easy-to-understand reports and gave a good picture of their child's progress and identified goals for future learning. Here are two parents' comments from that report:

> *Parent of a Year 1 student*
> *I find the portfolios very helpful so I can see how well he did with each topic. I can then help revise topics that have been difficult for him. Just me showing an interest in what he's been doing at school encourages him to talk and practice things he really enjoys* (ERO, 2008a: p.20).
>
> *Parent of a Year 7 student*
> *I feel that the parent interview was a combined goal setting process – identification of my child's strengths and weaknesses and identification of ways to achieve excellence for my child. My child was also involved in this interview* (ERO, 2008a: p.21).

The *Teaching of Mathematics: Good Practice* report includes this example:

> *The school encouraged learning partnerships among parents, students and teachers. The school sent mathematics workbooks home to parents at the end of each term, so that parents could see what their children were working towards in mathematics. Staff said this was better than sending portfolios home as workbooks were an ongoing record of class work and showed students' individual progress. Parents recorded their feedback on students' mathematical goals in these workbooks. Teachers shared the results of mathematics assessments with parents at parent-teacher interviews. Parent attendance at these meetings was consistently high* (ERO, 2007g: p.13).

Schools demonstrating good practice in assessment gave students and their parents useful and relevant information about the assessment processes they used. Students and parents understood how the school was working to meet the student's interests, aspirations and learning needs. The partnership between family, whānau and school was enhanced through this common understanding about the school's assessment processes. Families were also invited to participate in celebrations of student achievement.

In *The Collection and Use of Assessment: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* (ERO, 2007c), these schools provided reports that included comprehensive information about how to interpret the information provided. Information sessions/evenings were held for parents to explain grade point average and standards-based assessment.

Teachers gave parents detailed information about National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA), the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and course assessment requirements. Teachers often made good use of visual aids, such as student portfolios and electronic files, to report to parents on their child's achievement in a variety of essential skill and learning areas. Evidence of student self-assessment was also shared.

To conclude, here is an example from this report:

> *Parents received three reports a year: progress, formative and summative. Each report had a learning plan based on identified skills and areas for improvement, to help guide parents on next learning steps for the student. Teachers regularly updated parents when students were part of learning support/extension programmes. Parents commented that the use of a student logbook was a very effective means of providing communication between school and home about student achievement, progress and next learning steps. Next learning steps were discussed with parents and students at interviews. Targeted meetings with parents included explaining the curriculum areas and course selection. Interim reports were sent home prior to the interviews so that parents had a good knowledge of student progress and next learning steps before the interviews occurred.*
>
> *The summative report provided parents with key overview information of their child's year, including:*
>
> - *essential skills achievement*
> - *unit and achievement standard attainment*
> - *attendance*
> - *curriculum level (basic, proficient, advanced).*

LEADERSHIP IN AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Introduction

Effective school leadership begins with the principal but beyond that recognises that all those in leadership, management and governance have important roles to play. These roles are clearly defined and grounded in shared visions, values and expectations. Leaders are given support to develop the skills needed for the tasks they undertake. They set the tone for the school culture and build respectful relationships. Leaders celebrate diversity and model inclusive, culturally-appropriate ways of operating. They work in partnership with and offer leadership opportunities to other staff, students, parents, whānau and people in the broader education community.

School leadership

Recent research has highlighted the importance of school leadership in improving student learning and enhancing the effectiveness of teachers. The importance of effective school leadership can be seen in one school cited in *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools:*

> *Turning a troubled school into a successful school is heavily reliant on good leadership. The appointment of a new principal has provided this school with a sound platform for strengthening teachers' professional learning and development and for giving them support in improving student learning and achievement. The principal is working with staff to develop their analysis skills so that they can use assessment information to identify where they need to place their teaching and professional development priorities* (ERO, 2009e: p.29).

As one of the teachers in this school remarked *"Our principal has made a huge difference through her strong leadership"* (ERO, 2009e: p.30).

ERO has also found that leaders set the tone for the school and the interactions and relationships in and around it. In *Managing Transience: Good Practice in Primary School*s (ERO, 2007m), ERO found that schools working effectively with transient students had principals who set and maintained a positive school culture through their leadership of staff. For example, principals acted as ethical role models to staff, by placing priority on catering for all students and ensuring that transient students received the support and resources they needed.

Leaders also act as role models for staff and students in other ways. Here is a description of a secondary principal at a boys' school from *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students:*

> *The principal provides a strong role model for all-round achievement. He regularly makes short historical presentations to the whole school, takes a keen interest in the school choirs and has directed school drama productions. He is also a strong pedagogical leader and has used his own research about educating boys to support the professional learning of teachers* (ERO, 2008d: p.12).

Effective school leaders are interested in what happens right across their schools. According to *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* (ERO, 2009d), successful leaders:

- understood that it was their responsibility to inquire into achievement and progress at each level of the school. They used assessment information to lead changes in teaching for all children, including those in Years 1 and 2
- developed a culture of school-wide inquiry, giving time for collegial discussion to critique whether intended improvements were brought about and assist teachers to build their professional understanding of progressions children need to succeed
- were involved in establishing, communicating and monitoring clear expectations of achievement and progress for children
- knew where these early expectations fitted with those set for succeeding years
- established their own data monitoring, analysis and reflection cycles and used these to decide on, or recommend, necessary changes to professional learning and development, learning resources and teaching programmes to improve achievement for all children.

In *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools* (ERO, 2009a), ERO saw an important difference between schools that were managing their professional learning well and those that were not. This difference related to the quality of the principal's leadership in relation to professional learning. Effective principals had a rationale for what professional learning would achieve in their schools and its relationship to improving outcomes for students. They were knowledgeable about the place and value of educational research. They were willing to share leadership roles with other staff and participate in professional learning programmes. They worked effectively with their boards to resource professional learning and involved the school community. The report describes the importance of this approach:

> *Effective principals actively involve themselves in the learning process. They were not always seen as leading the PLD but were present and active as learners. Consequently, their professional discussions with staff were based on a shared understanding about new knowledge relevant to their school* (ERO, 2009a: p.13).

In *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2010a), ERO says that effective leaders made good use of assessment information to:

- set high expectations
- identify school-wide patterns and trends in achievement
- set and monitor increasingly challenging targets to improve student achievement and progress
- identify groups of students needing support with their learning
- identify recommendations as a result of systematic self review
- identify school-wide priorities
- report to boards of trustees and communities
- select professional development priorities.

In *Managing Transience: Good Practice in Primary Schools* (ERO, 2007m), ERO describes effective principals and other school leaders as playing an important role in linking with families and communities. For example, they would conduct the induction interviews with families and maintain connections with ongoing inter-agency support (such as: social workers; Child, Youth and Family; and Housing New Zealand).

The report on *Including Students with High Needs* emphaises the importance of leadership in its conclusion:

> *The quality of leadership, and the extent to which a school could adopt a specialised pedagogy for students with high needs, were more important than funding. Schools that had an ethical, committed, innovative, informed and co-ordinated approach to Including Students with High Needs provide the examples of good practice for others to follow* (ERO, 2010c: p.32).

Leadership, management and governance

A strength of an effective school is the way in which the leadership roles are clearly defined, yet are fluid enough to cover a range of eventualities. As well as each person in a leadership, management or governance role understanding the parameters of their role, there is respect and support for those in the other roles. Everyone understands the importance of building a shared commitment to the school's vision and the way in which their individual, and sometimes multiple, roles contribute to this. Principals working in this way often use distributed leadership models with high levels of delegation and trust.

This example is from *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students:*

> *By using the leadership abilities of teachers throughout the school, senior managers were able to draw on teachers' initiative, and were also able to build these capabilities as teachers took responsibility for different aspects of school operations. Distributing leadership tasks in this way supported positive relationships across the teaching staff and provided the impetus and motivation for them to successfully promote student achievement* (ERO, 2008d: p.15).

ERO reported that while principals in effective schools held strong strategic roles, in large schools other senior managers had direct responsibility and oversight for many day-to-day operations. This role needed senior staff to be highly effective and very well organised managers. In most cases, schools made time for their senior management team to provide leadership for pastoral, pedagogical, curriculum, professional development and assessment initiatives. While there was almost always a strong senior management team involvement in implementing key school processes, the principal kept the overall direction in mind.

> *Principals and school senior management teams in this evaluation were highly effective leaders. In all cases, principals played a critical role in influencing how the school's goals were developed, articulated and subsequently achieved. School principals oversaw teamwork and cooperation, aimed at ensuring a school-wide focus on the shared vision and goals* (ERO 2008d: p.13).

School Governance: An Overview (ERO, 2007k) stated that the professional leadership of the principal was integral to successful leadership, management and governance. The tone the principal set permeated the decision-making processes as in this example:

> *Committed and supportive relationships among the board, principal and staff were evident and assisted trustees to undertake their governance roles purposefully in an atmosphere of collegiality and professional trust* (ERO, 2007k: p.9).

ERO found that in schools with effective professional leadership, a shared vision focused on the achievement of all students. The board of trustees was given useful and timely reports on student achievement to aid in their governance role, especially, on strategic planning and financial decision-making. *School Governance: An Overview* (ERO, 2007k) includes these descriptions of effective principals from individual school reports:

> *The school was well managed and governed. The principal provided sound leadership and clear direction for the school. A strong management team supported his collegial approach to school improvement.*
>
> *The principal was an effective leader. The board of trustees and the staff responded well to his open and inclusive approach. The collegial board and staff culture supported the development of the school's vision, management systems and professional discussion* (ERO, 2007k: p.8).

Leadership opportunities

Effective leaders create opportunities to build the leadership capability of their staff, students and school community.

> *Opportunities for others to take a leadership role were evident in many schools where partnerships were strong. Principals often devolved leadership responsibilities for engagement to other members of the school community. In some schools, middle managers or teaching staff coordinated the range of activities to engage with particular groups of parents, whānau and communities. Parents had opportunities to take on leadership roles with other parents, with members of their own cultural community, and also with students* (ERO, 2008a: p.15).

The principals in *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* were described as:

> *… able to build distributed networks that enabled their staff to assume leadership responsibility. Staff often demonstrated considerable professional commitment and leadership in the way they promoted a wide range of achievement opportunities for boys by actively participating in classroom and co-curricular activities. Boys spoke positively about the various chances they had to work alongside their teachers in cultural, sporting and outdoor activities* (ERO, 2008g: p.23).

Professional learning was one area where effective principals often delegated responsibility.

> *High quality leaders offered teachers opportunities to lead or facilitate professional learning and development. In some cases, teachers were selected because they had a strong passion for a specific area or sound teaching practice in it. …*
> *The teacher-leaders (lead teachers) were willing to be observed by other teachers and openly discussed their classroom programme and practice. They also gave them encouragement and well-constructed feedback. Most lead teachers were involved in study, and willingly shared their new knowledge at professional forums such as staff, syndicate or team meetings. Lead teachers had often learned or developed the special skills that made them suitable mentors or coaches for their colleagues* (ERO, 2009b: p.13).

Another opportunity for delegated leadership was provided by many schools when designing and implementing their curriculum.

> *A group of senior teachers has produced a useful discussion document to guide further school-wide discussion about how the key competencies could be introduced at Years 9 and 10. This includes starter questions that relate to identifying what is already being done at departmental level; how the key competencies could be developed school-wide and establishing a timeline for their inclusion and implementation by 2010* (ERO, 2009e: p.5).

This description of leadership opportunities in well-prepared schools comes from *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum:*

> *Strong professional leadership was highly evident in most of these schools. Leaders were both driving and managing change, often sharing responsibility for development by creating leadership opportunities at all levels of the school* (ERO, 2010: p.18).

In *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d), ERO says that effective schools recognised the need for students to take responsibility for their learning and decision-making and, where possible, gave them opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills. These schools had developed relationships and communication that reflected the skills that students would require, not just during their time at school but also for their life once they had left school. Senior students underlined in their comments to ERO how much they valued the open and adult-to-adult approach taken by staff members.

Progress in Pacific Student Achievement pilot gave an example of a school providing leadership opportunities for its Pacific parents:

> *Teachers run model classes for the parents so that they know what it feels like to be a child in today's classroom. This enables parents to understand the techniques that teachers use to help their children to learn. Once parents are confident about what it is that teachers and students should do in the classroom, they become 'lead parents' for other groups of parents, so that this knowledge about teaching and learning is passed on systematically throughout the school community* (ERO, 2009c: p.24).

Finally, here is an example of parent leadership from *Partners in Learning: Good Practice:*

> *Cottage meetings are held in parents' homes. Each term a parent organises a meeting for up to 15 other parents from their street (or of their acquaintance). The principal attends these meetings and discusses any topics parents want to present. School managers welcome opportunities to consult with parents, and whānau and hear their comments* (ERO, 2008b: p.5).

Leadership development

All leaders benefit from developing their leadership, management and governance skills. In effective schools this is built into long-term planning, aligned to the school's strategic goals and shared widely.

In this example from *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools* (ERO, 2009a), school leaders developed their leadership skills through research, participation and mentoring:

> *The principal has up-to-date knowledge of educational research and this has been instrumental in leading the development of the school's professional learning focus on literacy, numeracy and assessment. Together with her school leaders, she has also influenced the professional development practices the school has developed over several years* (ERO, 2009: p.14).

A teacher in this school commented, *"School leaders participate in the learning and act as guides and mentors to others. They reflect our school culture where everyone is regarded as a learner"* (ERO, 2009,p.14).

Many effective schools are using coaching and mentoring strategies to improve leadership capability and enhance classroom practice.

Here is an example from *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students:*

> *As part of the coaching/mentoring initiative, staff chose a potential coach from a short list of staff and subsequently worked with that person throughout the school year to develop their skills in their selected priority area. The teacher initially worked with the coach to develop goals related to the priority area and these goals formed the basis of a series of observations held during the first three terms of the year. Each teacher had a total of six observations. During the fourth term, each teacher prepared a reflective report on how the coaching process had helped him or her to improve classroom practice. Feedback from selected students contributed to the report* (ERO, 2008d: p.23).

Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students (ERO, 2008d) explained that leadership development also offered benefits to senior students. In the first instance, they provided a way for students to feel committed and involved in the important activities of the school. They also provided a context for organising significant school events and, in some cases, dealing with complex problems. The skills gained by student leaders were important in their development while at school, but they also enabled students to develop the tacit knowledge and social skills important in life after school.

Visions, values and expectations

Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students (ERO, 2008d) describes good practice as being characterised by schools having a clearly developed vision of what they wanted to achieve for all their students. While the goals in each school varied, the joint commitment to agreed objectives gave a sense of direction for overall school development and also, in this case, supporting senior students. A description of one school highlights this commitment:

> *One secondary school had developed a 'learning charter' that supported its aspiration for the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. The school developed its charter during a three-year consultation period with staff students and wider school community. The charter also included a commitment to students on what they could expect from the school and, especially, their teachers. Uppermost, were the provision of a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acknowledgement of students' strengths and interests, regular and constructive feedback, and classrooms that provided worthwhile and challenging activities* (ERO, 2008d: p. 9).

The report continues by explaining that schools identified different sorts of goals. Some had a very strong focus on academic achievement while others had a broader focus that included academic achievement, vocational success, and broader social and cultural goals. The reason for these different approaches depended on the context of each school, the communities they served and the varying needs and aspirations of students.

What made the vision and goals important was the extent to which they were understood and accepted by the school community. Of particular importance was the extent to which staff felt responsible for meeting these shared goals and the extent to which the goals focused school staff on achieving an ambitious vision for their students.

In many schools with successful anti-bullying cultures, (*Safe schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying,* ERO 2007d) explicit values underpinned school-wide policies, practices, expectations and behaviours. These values were often expressed in schools' mission or vision statements and were an integral feature of schools with a special character.

The importance of values is described in a case study in *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum:*

> *The school's curriculum is clearly based on the community's values. It fosters key competencies for learning and reflects a focus on literacy and numeracy learning. The curriculum provides an effective base for promoting students' learning. The board, managers and teachers take collective responsibility for student achievement and make good provision for learning support where this is required. Students, teachers and parents have a strong sense of belonging to the school* (ERO, 2010a: p.23).

Effective leaders set the expectations for purposeful learning, high quality teaching and positive interactions. *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d) also shows that schools in that evaluation had high expectations for students and staff. For students this meant that there was constant encouragement to

strive and succeed. This was reinforced in the messages that students received from their form teachers, subject teachers, careers advisers, peers (including student leaders), deans or supervisors. Most importantly, the emphasis on high expectations and encouragement to succeed did not begin in the senior school but was an ongoing part of a student's experience from school entry.

In accordance with the schools' high expectations, there was an understanding that managers would recognise and respond to poor staff performance. Staff members were given support and guidance to improve their teaching performance, but at the same time, senior managers were prepared to address matters of poor performance in the interests of maintaining high quality student outcomes. The effective management of poor performance ultimately supported the overall morale of staff, because staff understood the benefits for the school, for the workload of other staff members, and for enhanced student learning.

Parents also have expectations that schools will do all they can to support their child's learning. Sharing common expectations for learning and achievement underpinned this message in *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities* (ERO, 2008a), in which parents readily acknowledged the positive impact on their child when expectations were realised:

> *The school is very welcoming and has high expectations for learning and behaviour. It supports and encourages all students. This has given us great pleasure when we look at the change in our son. He is happy, interested, inquisitive and capable. Parent of a Year 7 student* (ERO, 2008a: p.23).

School culture

A school's culture can be defined as the reality for those working within it. It gives those who work in the school support and identity, and creates a framework for learning. Each school has a different reality of 'how things are'. In effective schools, school culture underpins good practice in supporting student engagement, progress and learning. It helps to shape the way that school personnel respond to challenges and also reflects the values of the school in action.

For the schools in *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d), a positive school culture was reflected in:

- goals shared throughout the school
- safe and positive relationships
- individual student focus and support
- a problem-solving ethos
- the celebration of success.

In describing their school's culture, many school leaders included reference to the benefits or outcomes for students. They included statements about students being able to:

- reach their full potential
- take on leadership roles
- be confident and responsible
- be motivated to learn
- stand tall and proud.

In *Safe Schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying* (ERO, 2007d), ERO discussed with school personnel how the organisation and culture of the school supported the provision of a safe emotional and physical environment for students. In the majority of schools the culture was described as being supportive and caring with a focus on clear expectations and mutually respectful relationships. School culture that supported the physical and emotional safety of students also included an emphasis on family values, inclusiveness, and personal responsibility.

In some schools the culture was described in relation to the outcomes for students' learning, achievement and success. A strong focus on pastoral care was a particular feature of the school culture in many of the secondary schools in this report. Pastoral care networks offered many opportunities for student support, monitoring of behaviour and links to external agencies.

Effective schools described in *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d) had developed many forms of celebration for academic, co-curricular, vocational and administrative endeavours. These regular and ongoing celebrations reinforced, in the school community, the idea of the school as a positive learning environment, one that helped to foster and value success. From one point of view the emphasis placed on celebration acted like a form of internal marketing, with staff and students seeing themselves as members of a successful community.

Relationships

Effective leaders set the tone for the school. Positive relationships between management and staff, between staff and students, and between the school and the community, were key features of effective schools.

In *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d) ERO says that positive staff-student relationships were evident in the overall tone of these schools and classrooms and in the ways teachers and students interacted in formal and informal situations. High quality teaching reflected the nature of the relationships

between staff and students. ERO found that positive staff-student relationships provided an environment where students felt they could discuss difficult issues with their teachers and with the school's senior managers. Students also had increasing flexibility and say in decisions about how and what they would learn.

Effective leaders also sought to build positive relationships between the school and its parent community, iwi and local cultural groups, other local schools and educational institutions, educational and social agencies and organisations, the business community and even with international partners that might enhance opportunities for their students.

Promoting Pacific Student Achievement: Schools' Progress gives the following example:

> *Many schools, especially in urban centres, developed home-school partnership programmes designed to improve relationships and communication and increase engagement with their Pacific community. Community pastors were often key contacts and churches were used for meetings because of the close connections that most Pacific families had with their churches. Schools employed interpreters to reduce any language difficulties. Pacific liaison staff provided a trusted channel of communication to sustain collaborative relationships* (ERO, 2010b: p.14).

In *Managing Transience: Good Practice in Primary Schools* (ERO, 2007m), ERO found that effective leaders also managed a strong team approach in their schools. Collaboration and consistency were also used to support the behaviour of students. This was not limited just to consistent sets of rules and consequences for students throughout the school, but included consideration by staff of the range of social and educational factors likely to be affecting student achievement and behaviour. Where transient students arrived with a complex set of needs, teamwork was also important in ensuring that the right people and support were provided. This included using such staff as RTLBs, attendance officers, Reading Recovery and other special support teachers and staff, social workers and counsellors.

Diversity and inclusivity

Effective school leaders acknowledged and celebrated diversity. They listened to the aspirations that parents and whānau had for their children and young people. They found culturally appropriate ways of communicating and consulting with their school communities. They modelled respectful interactions and ensured that diverse voices were heard.

In *Partners in Learning: Parents' Voices* (ERO, 2008c) Māori parents and whānau told ERO that their children and mokopuna were their priority and involvement in their education was critical. They expected teachers to have a range of skills and strategies to engage their children in learning. Māori parents expected schools to give them honest, accurate and useful information about their child's progress and achievement.

They wanted their children to become confident learners who accepted challenges and maintained their personal mana.

Māori parents said they wanted to be involved in their child's school, be invited to come to school and be part of their child's learning. They wanted their culture and values acknowledged through the use of Māori protocols, for example, mihi and karakia at meetings. They also expected schools to provide programmes in te reo Māori and tikanga that supported their children's learning.

Pacific parents, in the same report, wanted their children to have a good education that involved them as their children's first teachers. They saw the home giving their child a strong foundation that included maintaining their first language. Therefore, Pacific parents said, they wanted schools to help their children learn English. They expected schools to give their child homework, and that through homework parents would support and learn with their child. They expected communication to be regular and timely and they expected to be consulted on a range of matters.

For Pacific parents, face-to-face communication was an important part of personalising engagement. These parents found having newsletters translated into their first language and posted to them was a good way of informing them about what was happening in the school. For some parents, having Pacific representation on the board of trustees was beneficial because it gave them a voice in the wider functioning of the school. Their involvement in cultural groups and festivals in the school and the wider community helped to build confidence and a sense of belonging.

In the same report, parents who had migrated to New Zealand had high expectations for their children's learning and high expectations of the schools their children attended. Refugee and migrant parent groups who spoke to ERO saw education as very important, and expected that schools would support their children to learn and achieve well alongside other children.

They wanted their children to be treated as equals in the New Zealand education system. Immigrant parents expected teachers to be proactive in developing relationships with them and learning about their cultural backgrounds. They wanted to be valued for the contribution they could make to their children's learning and to the school. Many of the parents who spoke to ERO expressed their belief that New Zealand schools were not good at working with diverse communities.

Parents of children with special needs expected that their children (and families) would be valued as part of the school community and treated with respect. They wanted their relationships with school personnel to be based on empathy and mutual respect. Parents expected schools to welcome and value each child for his or her difference. They felt that engagement was enhanced when staff were approachable, accessible, and interested in them and their children.

EFFECTIVE TEACHING

Introduction

Effective teachers are committed to providing high quality education for all their learners. They treat children and young people as individuals, positively acknowledging their differences and building collaborative learning relationships. Teachers set high yet attainable expectations, providing learning-rich programmes that respond to learner needs and interests. Effective teachers differentiate the curriculum as needed and engage learners in purposeful learning through a range of media and resources. Teachers are supported to undertake professional learning and to strengthen their pedagogical content knowledge.

Commitment to improving student outcomes

While teachers can vary in background, training and teaching style, current research highlights key dispositions and strategies for effective teaching. A consistent theme in ERO's national evaluations and reports of good practice was the importance of both affective aspects (beliefs, values, attitudes, and teaching philosophies) and cognitive aspects (understanding of teaching, learning and assessment processes, subject knowledge, knowledge and use of research findings, and the application of these to their teaching style).

Progress in Pacific Student Achievement (ERO, 2007c) describes effective teachers working in one school achieving high success with Pacific students:

> *In a nutshell, teachers understand the difference between children being totally engaged in their learning rather than just being on task. They know who the Pacific children are in their classes, and they know about their achievement levels.*
>
> *All teachers expect that children will achieve well, and they want to motivate and support children to become proactive learners. They undertake training to extend their professional practice and their leadership skills so that, across the school, teachers plan and implement learning programmes that motivate children to be involved in learning. Lead teachers run internal professional development courses on literacy teaching skills. All teachers are taking a university paper in the teaching of mathematics….*
>
> *The performance appraisal system supports professional development initiatives and provides teachers with useful feedback on their classroom performance. Teachers want to know how they can improve their performance and senior leaders have had training on how to give critical feedback aimed at lifting teacher performance* (ERO, 2007c: p.22).

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 highlights inquiry, collaboration and urgency as hallmarks of committed teaching:

> *Effective teachers were more likely to inquire into ways of improving their teaching, and work collaboratively with other staff to share good practice. These teachers had a sense of urgency about developing the child as a reader and writer. Their teaching was evidentially based, deliberate and gave children opportunities to practise new skills and knowledge during the instructional classroom programme* (ERO, 2009d: p.1).

Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum describes how effective teachers in a case study school used assessment information to improve student outcomes:

> *High quality assessment data is used by classroom teachers to plan the next steps for individual students. Teachers skilfully use assessment information to inform planning and provide individualised programmes for children. Formal assessment folders, together with comprehensive written reports provide parents and students with a wealth of information about progress and achievement. Students in Years 4 to 6 are aware of the purpose of the lessons, the learning intentions and the associated success criteria. They have developed goals that are specific and include what they need to do, how they are going to do it, and how they will know when they have achieved their goals* (ERO, 2010: p.26).

Including Students with High Needs talks of staff at the most inclusive schools expressing the importance of the school meeting the needs of the student rather than fitting a student to the school. The report continues:

> *The staff at the most inclusive schools demonstrated a commitment to educate students with high needs. This commitment went beyond offering a welcoming environment for students, and extended to ensuring that the school made adaptations to cater for students with high needs and their families* (ERO, 2010b: p.11).

Acknowledging individuality

Effective schools and teachers have a strong focus on supporting individual students' achievement. They place a priority on continually improving their systems and strategies for addressing the individual academic, social and cultural needs of students. In *The Teaching of Mathematics: Good Practice,* one school built this into their mathematics programme in the following ways:

> *The students in this school came from many different cultures and ethnicities. The teachers took care to ensure that the mathematics activities were appropriate and interesting for all their students and based on contexts for learning that they believed were relevant to individual and groups of students in their class* (ERO, 2007g: p.17).

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 (ERO, 2009d) shows that good data analysis and interpretation helped teachers decide on teaching objectives, set group and individual learning goals, and identify specific reading behaviours to focus on. Teachers used additional, or more specific, assessments to focus on children who were not making expected progress. They targeted additional instruction and monitoring for these children. Formal assessments were often accompanied by teachers' anecdotal jottings and observations about significant needs or successes observed during a lesson.

Effective schools also had systems to identify, as early as possible, students who were experiencing difficulty so they could support them in their learning. ERO's report on the *Invercargill Schools Cluster* (ERO, 2007l) outlines many ways in which those schools sought to acknowledge and work with individuals at risk of not achieving. In primary schools these programmes included:

- teacher-aide support for students with learning and behavioural needs
- reading recovery programmes
- individual and small group tutoring
- a structured reading programme to encourage reluctant readers to read
- oral language support for junior students
- journal-assisted reading for students who do not qualify for reading recovery
- buddy reading programmes
- physical skills enrichment programme that identifies individual needs and provides activities tailored to those needs
- support from the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) for students with learning and behavioural difficulties
- speech language support from a speech language therapist.

Invercargill Schools Cluster (ERO, 2007l) shows that Invercargill secondary schools also developed a range of strategies to support students who were underachieving:

- an after-school study support centre
- teacher-aide support for students with learning and behavioural needs
- small class size for selected groups with high learning needs
- referrals to external agencies where appropriate
- offering STAR courses in line with the interests and abilities of identified students
- close monitoring of students at risk of not achieving literacy credits at NCEA Levels 1 and 2
- reading assistance programmes
- the provision of senior courses aimed at students at risk, for example, academies in automotive engineering, catering and sport
- access to alternative education pathways
- close monitoring of students who leave school to ensure that they go on to employment or further training.

Including Students with High Needs (ERO, 2010b) tells the story of how the parents of one student with high needs were greeted by an enthusiastic principal when they went to discuss enrolling their daughter. These parents had not received such a warm welcome at other schools. Subsequently, a programme was put in place where the child, who was in a wheelchair, had autism and did not speak, was included in most class activities in her mainstream class – including dancing.

Acknowledging students as individuals often goes beyond the classroom and includes a range of other support staff. This secondary example is taken from *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information: Good Practice in Secondary Schools:*

> *The school's assessment team included an academic advisor. She met with all students in Years 12 and 13 to negotiate academic pathways to ensure that students had ongoing success. Students also had the option to change pathways in the future because of academic results or career choices. Students and their parents said they valued the discussions and were pleased to have both choice and success at school* (ERO, 2007c: p.18).

Learning relationships

Of all the interactions that take place in a school, those that are part of learning relationships have the most direct impact on student outcomes. Learning relationships occur between teachers and students, among students, and between teachers, students and their families. *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* emphasised that strong and positive relationships were integral to developing a successful learning environment:

> *The development and maintenance of good quality relationships had links to the quality of leadership decisions, the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and the school's espoused and enacted values. Good quality relationships were an intrinsic component of classroom and co-curricular learning, developing of self management skills and self image, student mentoring programmes, and approaches to behaviour and discipline* (ERO, 2008g: p.25).

Learning relationships are purposeful and focused on teaching and learning, as in this example from a primary school in *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2:*

> *Teachers use a wide range of effective instructional strategies. These include modelling and explaining new skills, and carefully sequencing learning so children can build on their previous learning. They prompt and encourage children to extend their ideas and they ask questions that encourage them to think more deeply. Children are provided with specific feedback that explains to them how well they have achieved the aspects taught in that particular lesson. The purpose of lessons is shared orally and often recorded in class learning journals. Children spoken to were able to share their learning goals* (ERO, 2009d: p.26).

A school in *The Teaching of Mathematics: Report of Good Practice* (ERO, 2007g) had a range of practices in place to build learning relationships with other students. These included:

- encouraging students to be responsible for their own learning
- encouraging risk-taking in learning (to learn that it is okay to make mistakes)
- grouping students according to their progress in mathematics
- appointing students to peer tutor roles
- teaching students the rule of 'ask three before me' to encourage students to work together.

Partners in Learning: Parent Voices (ERO, 2008c) found that developing and maintaining good relationships with school staff matters for parents. Although this is important for all parents, the evaluation found this was critical for those from minority groups where the potential to feel marginalised was more apparent. One parent commented:

> *Learning relationships develop when there is an understanding of tikanga, where Māori knowledge is recognised and understood. Currently this is not the experience of all whānau. Māori parent* (ERO, 2008c: p.13).

Promoting Pacific Student Achievement: Schools' Progress (ERO, 2010b) discussed schools that had succeeded in raising Pacific student achievement. These schools had close links with parents, families and communities. Some schools had a Pacific liaison person who assisting with engaging parents in students' learning and in the life of the school. The report states, *"Effective schools had a variety of ways to create and maintain a climate that was inclusive and welcoming for Pacific students and their families"* (ERO, 2010b: p.2).

Schools with a culture that is inclusive of students with high needs have developed effective relationships and open communication with the students' families.

> *Good communication at the enrolment stage made it clear which health, social and academic issues the family saw as important. Good communication also made it easier to set goals for individual education plans and, once a child was working in the classroom, made it possible for teachers and parents to work together to support student learning and development* (ERO, 2010c: p.15).

High expectations

Reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 (ERO, 2009d) states that the expectations of both school leaders and teachers can influence the rates of children's progress or actual success. Even when teachers are focused on children's learning, inappropriate teacher expectations can undermine them, or impede progress. Teacher expectations have been found to vary according to student ethnicity, ability, gender and other characteristics unrelated to a student's actual capability.

An example of appropriate expectations is from *Partners in Learning: Good Practice*

> *Students learn in an inclusive environment where they are respected as individuals and where teachers hold high expectations for their achievement and progress. Teachers show respect for and understanding of their students' background* (ERO, 2008b: p.3).

One critical element for success is that teachers' expectations focus on a child's potential rather than current or past performance. *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* discusses expectations in schools with good practice:

> *Expectations were challenging and focused on improvement. Some teachers understood they were expected to match or exceed national achievement levels. School decile ranking appeared not to be a significant determinant of expectation: some low decile schools aimed to have children achieving at nationally-referenced expectations and constantly reviewed progress towards meeting their goals. Some teams or syndicates set their own annual targets and included these as part of teachers' appraisal goals and for deciding on professional learning and development needs. These targets often promoted improved achievement for groups of children at different year levels and from different ethnic groups or gender. Students' progress rates were monitored regularly and used to identify the need for support or enrichment programmes* (ERO, 2009d: pp.36-37).

In *Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* the case studies show that leaders and teachers in effective schools set high expectations for themselves as well as their students, as in these examples:

> *The principal sets clear expectations for teaching and learning that are well understood and help drive curriculum planning, assessment and reporting* (ERO, 2010a: p.27).

> *The principal and deputy principal provide skilled and effective school leadership. They have high expectations of themselves, the staff and the students and are knowledgeable about good practice and assessment* (ERO, 2010a: p.29).

Learning-rich environments

A learning-rich environment enhances identity, motivation and support, as in this example from *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2:*

> *Well-paced lessons helped children to maintain enthusiasm for the learning task and successfully complete selected activities. Teachers ensured that children were reading, or using print, during every moment of the reading lesson. Children had plentiful and appropriately levelled texts in their reading boxes, big books, poetry cards, reading games and in class and school libraries. In addition children had supporting activities such as letter and word games, and used technology that involved reading, viewing and listening. Displayed reading goals, modelling books and task boards gave visual prompts encouraging children to read or use print independently while the teacher was involved with other groups of children* (ERO, 2009d: p.17).

The Teaching of Writing: Good Practice in Years 4 and 8 gives an example from further up the school of a learning rich environment for writing:

> *The classroom environments were text-rich and well organised. Students independently used a range of dictionaries, student work samples, and posters about sight words, the purpose of writing and parts of speech. Students also used planning worksheets to help them develop their ideas for writing. They were aware of, and referred to, the expectations for their stage of writing* (ERO, 2008f: p.7).

Part of an appropriate learning environment is good classroom management. Highly effective teachers in *Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching* (ERO, 2010f) demonstrated good classroom management. This was based on the relationships they had developed with students and their experience in managing inquiry learning methods and/or scientific investigations. The classroom management shown by these teachers also allowed students to take responsibility for their learning (for instance working on a practical investigation of their own design).

This report also tells of a case study intermediate school with a specialist science environment

> *The school has a specialist science teacher who works in the school laboratory. He delivers Physical and Material World science, while classroom teachers deliver Living World and Planet Earth and Beyond. The teacher in charge of the science laboratory works closely with the science curriculum leader to ensure that students experience a range of engaging teaching approaches. This teacher has developed a laboratory learning environment that includes a finch breeding programme and a large variety of tropical fish. There is a wide variety of science resources in the classroom. The teacher's philosophy is that students should focus on practical activities and on participating in learning conversations as opposed to spending long periods of time writing* (ERO, 2010f: p.23).

Effective pedagogy

Effective teachers take time to organise learning rich programmes in which students can see the purpose of their learning, make links to past learning and with other curriculum areas, and relate to authentic contexts.

In this example from *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* teachers in a contributing primary school used a range of strategies to maximise learning opportunities:

> *Teacher planning and programmes show teachers using deliberate acts of teaching through modelling, prompting, questioning, giving feedback, telling, explaining and directing. Teachers identify the learning focus for children to give them opportunities to read, search, make predictions, cross check or confirm their ideas, self correct and fully understand text. Learning intentions are constantly shared and discussed with children who are then given many opportunities to practise the newly introduced skills* (ERO, 2009d: p.15).

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 also sets out this effective practice:

> *Children knew what the lesson was about. Teachers made this clear to them and revisited the purpose and goals during the lesson or activity. Modelling books were used to highlight the learning focus and reading behaviour children would use to succeed. Teachers recognised a teachable moment and responded to learning needs as they arose. Follow-up or response activities were carefully selected to help children practise the skills focused on during the guided reading lesson* (ERO, 2009d: p.17).

One of the key strategies in effective teaching is for teachers to provide timely and constructive feedback. *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* (ERO, 2007a) lists some of the characteristics of effective feedback. Feedback is effective when it:

- focuses on the learning intention of the task
- occurs as the students are doing the task
- provides information on how and why the student had succeeded at the task or how they have misunderstood aspects of the intended learning
- provides strategies to help the student improve
- assists the student to understand the goals of the learning and the expected standards of achievement.

Effective science teaching in *Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching* (ER0, 2010f) was characterised by the following:

- high quality planning, including strategies for identifying and responding to students' prior knowledge, and for teaching students the significant scientific concepts (or big ideas)
- flexible approaches that took advantage of students' curiosity and were able to meet the diverse needs of students
- an emphasis on the quality of thinking, or conceptual development, undertaken by students
- high quality investigations, reflection and discussions that helped students develop their understanding of scientific knowledge and scientific processes
- engaging practical activities that allowed students to investigate their own ideas as well as those of others – these activities were collaborative, relevant, and drew on local context as well the interests of students
- the use of literacy strategies to support scientific learning and, in some cases, to provide additional context for reinforcing literacy skills
- the careful integration of numeracy and literacy teaching so that science activities were not lost
- teachers' sensitivity to the religious and cultural background of students
- links to careers that directly or indirectly used scientific understanding
- high quality assessment and feedback that let students know how well they were achieving in science, that informed classroom teaching and learning, and was used as the basis of meaningful reports to the board and parents.

Finally, from *Progress in Pacific Student Achievement* (2009c), the following excerpt describes effective teaching with Pacific students in one school:

> *Teachers take a great deal of care about the ways they manage children's early days at school to make sure that they are happy and that school is engaging and fun for them. At enrolment, they collect comprehensive information about children's backgrounds, experiences and earlier learning. They use this information in their teaching so that classroom discussions can be based on topics that the children already know something about. The children enjoy being able to show their teachers that they already know quite a lot.*
>
> *At all levels of the school, contexts for lessons are chosen because they are familiar to students and can be used to extend their prior knowledge. Children come alive in the classroom when they learn new skills and concepts through teaching based on their personal experiences. They want to be at school and are keen to learn more* (ERO, 2009c: p.23).

Differentiated curriculum

Progress in Pacific Student Achievement (2009c) states that critical drivers for the success of all students are their presence at school, their engagement and participation in learning, and their success in achieving good educational outcomes. Being at school, and '*participating in learning that is both tailored and relevant*' are precursors for students' achievement and success, whether they are at primary or secondary school.

In *Reading and Writing in Yeas 1 and 2* ERO outlines how one school approaches personalised learning in writing:

> *Assessment information was used to respond to individual children's needs. Although teachers' planning often identified a class-wide writing purpose, individual children's goals or group learning intentions were carefully matched to their needs. Teachers shared the moderated writing sample with each child and discussed their next goal with them. Each group or individual child had writing goals recorded in their exercise books. These goals were referred to and monitored through regular teacher-children conferences, and were formally reflected on at the end of each term before setting new goals. Classroom displays highlighted examples of children's work that successfully showed writing features described in their goals* (ERO, 2009d: p.24).

Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching (ERO, 2010f), shows how teachers at one school had developed a flexible approach to science that allowed them to focus on the particular interests of students. This gave teachers the opportunity to make science relevant and engaging. The following excerpt is from one teacher's report to the board of trustees:

> *I had planned to start our science topics with "Light" but a chance remark from one of the children about finding that her water bottle was covered in water after she had taken it out of the freezer led to an investigation of what was happening. At the time she remarked that "the water must be leaking out of the plastic" and, as all the children nodded in agreement, I could see that this really was a "teaching moment"* (ERO, 2010f: p.10)!

An effective curriculum needs to be inclusive of a wide range of learning needs. *Including Students with High Needs* (ERO, 2010b) discusses how schools and teachers adapt the New Zealand Curriculum to develop programmes that engage students with high needs and in which they can succeed. Schools with students who are not yet operating at level 1 of the *New Zealand Curriculum* are using *Te Whāriki,* the early childhood curriculum, for example, to develop meaningful learning experiences for their students.

At the senior level, *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d) describes another approach to differentiating the curriculum:

> *This school had consistently high standards of teaching throughout. The quality of teaching was supported by an innovative seven-subject timetable (for junior and senior students) and well-developed multi-level teaching, both in junior classes and across the senior curriculum.*
>
> *The school's efforts to provide multi-level teaching and assessment were especially important in ensuring that, whatever the student's skills and abilities, they were placed in classes which, in the first instance, were relevant to their career's aspirations and were also going to provide a context for successful achievement. Students were able to connect what they were doing at school with what they wanted to do as a career* (ERO, 2008d: p.18).

Extra-curricular or co-curricular activities are also an important part of the overall school curriculum and provide opportunities for individuals to excel in other ways. ERO's evaluation, *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d), found that many school staff attached importance to co-curricular activities to give students other learning opportunities.

These included activities that extended the curriculum, were connected to school leadership and council positions, or introduced a range of sporting and cultural options. The feedback ERO received from students suggested that co-curricular activities offered "something for everyone" and that, in many cases, schools were open to supporting the interests and developing the talents of their students.

Use of media and resources

New Zealand schools are rich in teaching and learning resources for most curriculum areas – although the teaching of te reo Māori is one area ERO has identified as not being well supported by a range of suitable high quality resources (*Review of Curriculum Materials to Support the Teaching of Te Reo Māori,* ERO, 2008n). Other national evaluations have reported a wide range of suitable resources to support schools' teaching and learning goals across the curriculum.

The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Health and Physical Education (ERO, 2007p) found that in many classes, students had a good range of resources for health and physical education which were suited to their age and needs. The report explains that in these classes:

> *Resources were well organised and maintained and teachers were easily able to use resources that suited their classroom programmes. In programmes related to movement concepts and motor programmes, resources included a variety of indoor*

> *and outdoor spaces, and classroom sets of equipment sufficient for whole-class participation. In other units of work, the school had a range of resources, including books, videos, posters, and on-line resource*s (ERO, 2007p: p.16).

Effective teachers evaluate the appropriateness of available texts and resources and select those most appropriate for the students in their classes. *The Teaching of Social Studies: Good Practice* (ERO, 2007j) outlined appropriate resources for that curriculum area. Resources, it stated, should:

- provide for a range of student abilities
- allow for the application and extension of student skills
- acknowledge the New Zealand cultural mix
- be visually attractive
- have clear instructions
- facilitate independent and cooperative work
- have learning activities and outcomes that are consistent with the achievement objectives.

Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching (ERO, 2010f) found that schools generally had good resources for science education. The types of science equipment used by the schools varied depending on the school. For schools with specialist laboratories had a good selection of glassware, electrical circuitry, models, measuring equipment (such as rulers, measuring tapes, current meters and thermometers), chemicals and consumables (string, tape, table-tennis balls, balloons etc). These schools tended to be larger than the others and had specific science budgets that were managed by science leaders.

Smaller schools tended to collapse their curriculum budgets under one heading such as 'curriculum materials.' These schools, which did not have specialist classrooms or science laboratories, also tended to have more of a focus on less expensive everyday equipment. This could include magnifying glasses, large paper, pens, cardboard cutters (instead of scalpels), chopping boards, latex gloves, glass jars (instead of beakers), bicycle pumps, plastic bottles, fish tanks, saucepans and partially disassembled pieces of technology (phones, radios etc). The most important aspect was the availability and maintenance of these resources so that teachers could easily find and use them when required.

Effective teachers also design their own resources and use students' work as a resource. *The Teaching of Writing: Good Practice in Years 4 and* 8 gives an example of a range of resources one school used for teaching writing:

> *The school had a variety of resources available for both teachers and students to use. Teachers used a range of written work as models, such as the New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars for English, the teachers' own writing, and the students' own writing. Students used many resources that helped with the writing process such as planning, and the appropriate use of grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary. These resources included:*
>
> - *graphic organisers*
> - *T-charts and flow charts*
> - *Storyboards*
> - *Posters and wall charts*
> - *Wall displays of students' work*
> - *dictionaries and thesauri* (ERO, 2007f: p.7).

The appropriate and innovative use of information communications technology (ICT) and new technologies has featured in many national evaluations and reports of good practice. *The Teaching of Writing: Good Practice in Years 4 and 8*, includes this description:

> *ICT was used effectively for the teaching and learning of writing. Students had access to word processing and other software for publishing their work. Data projectors, digital cameras, and overhead projectors were also used for modelling and presenting writing. Students used the Internet to research information and were taught how to critically analyse the quality of the information they had gathered.* (ERO, 2007f: p.7)

Professional learning

Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools stated:

> *Teaching is a complex and demanding profession. Teachers require high quality support and training throughout their careers to ensure they have the strategies and skills to meet the needs of learners. Professional learning and development (PLD) is central to maintaining and improving teacher quality* (ERO, 2009a: p.1).

This national evaluation found wide variation in the quality of professional learning and development programmes and management. Where schools demonstrated high quality PLD management, they had a school culture in which professional learning was fostered and supported by school leaders. The PLD programmes aligned with school priorities and self review was used to monitor and evaluate the impact that PLD investment was having on improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Here is how one school in *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* approached PLD:

> *The staff at one school had worked together to develop principles to help structure their professional learning. These informed the way that various professional learning initiatives were undertaken, including staff-wide forums, classroom appraisals and small focus groups of staff investigating topics of importance. These professional learning principles included an emphasis on:*
>
> - *participating in good quality reflective dialogue*
> - *using meaningful student achievement information*
> - *developing ownership and individual responsibility*
> - *developing a shared language for the culture of learning*
> - *learning from each other in and across schools*
> - *building the capacity of staff and leadership* (ERO, 2008d: p.15).

In the very best schools, where there was a focus on improving outcomes for all learners, school leaders used analysed student achievement information to develop school priorities. Teachers were involved in collaborative discourse about best teaching practices and operated in a reflective and supportive environment. These schools were able to provide evidence of the effect that professional learning was having on teaching and learning.

The key challenges that schools faced in developing and managing their PLD programmes included: taking on too many PLD programmes or initiatives at once; the availability and quality of facilitators; not considering whether PLD included perspectives and strategies to support Māori and Pacific student learning; and not allowing sufficient time to embed new practices into day-to-day classroom teaching.

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge impacts on the delivery of the curriculum. In *The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Health and Physical Education* (ERO, 2007p) 69 percent of teachers were found to have the appropriate subject and pedagogical knowledge to provide programmes suitable for the students in their classes. Many of these teachers reported that ongoing professional development, school-wide guidance and collegial support helped them to continue to increase their pedagogical knowledge and expertise.

The evaluation, *Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching* (ERO, 2010f), also found that high quality science teaching throughout a school requires effective school leadership and teacher professional knowledge:

> *If science is to prosper in a school it should be given status by the principal and supported by an effective science leader. Teachers do not need to have a science qualification to be effective science teachers, but they do need to have a good understanding of scientific ideas along with the confidence to teach science well. Principals and science leaders need to provide teachers with professional support so that they develop the knowledge and skills required to sustain high quality science teaching as a regular part of the school programme* (ERO, 2010f: p.2).

ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS, WHĀNAU AND COMMUNITIES

Introduction

Effective schools listen to the aspirations that parents and whānau have for their children. They consult with them on relevant matters and communicate with them in a timely and appropriate manner. Teachers and support staff are approachable and knowledgeable. Teachers are willing to share their realistic appraisal of learner potential and progress. Effective schools value communication as a two-way experience. They also make use of agencies, organisations, resources and personnel in the wider community to enhance students' educational and social outcomes.

Research evidence shows that effective partnerships between schools and parents, whānau and communities can result in better outcomes for students. The better the relationship and engagement, the more positive the impact on students' learning. What ERO found through the *Partners in learning* evaluation series (ERO, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c) contributes to and complements existing research and evaluation studies about the importance of partnerships between schools and families.

In this national evaluation, engagement was defined as "a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities that focuses on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child."

Although all schools have ways of involving and communicating with parents and families, six key factors emerged as critical to enhancing and strengthening engagement.

- *Leadership:* Leadership is crucial in creating meaningful and respectful partnerships. Engagement between schools and their communities works well when there is vision and commitment from school leaders to working in partnership with all parents.
- *Relationships:* Supportive relationships both formal and informal are at the heart of effective partnerships. Mutual trust and respect are critical to relationships in which staff and parents share responsibility for children's learning and well-being.
- *School culture:* School culture reflects the values and attitudes that underpin home-school relationships. Schools that are committed to being inclusive enable all parents to be actively involved in decisions affecting their child, and respond to parents' concerns and questions promptly.
- *Partnerships:* Teachers work in partnership with parents, providing opportunities for them to learn about and share in their child's learning and achievement. Learning partnerships strengthen parents' understanding and involvement in their child's education. Parents feel their contributions are valued. Effective learning partnerships can have positive impacts on student outcomes.

- *Community networks:* Schools are an integral part of their communities. Parent and community expertise is valued and contributes to programmes and activities in the school. Schools are involved in community activities and events. Consultation is integral to engagement, and there is a shared understanding about the priorities for student achievement.
- *Communication:* Schools communicate with parents in ways that are timely, useful and easily understood. Opportunities for exchange of information are both formal and informal and appropriate for those involved. Barriers to effective communication are actively identified and overcome.

Aspirations

Taking the time to find out and to understand parents' aspirations for their children was an important element in forming useful partnerships. In *Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* ERO describes a school where:

> *Consultative practices are evident and the school is responsive to the outcomes of these. Whānau have been closely involved in curriculum development and the school is responsive to their aspirations for their children* (ERO, 2010: p.23).

In *Promoting Success for Māori Students: Schools' Progress* ERO discusses the importance of a sense of connectedness with the school:

> *A further factor commonly associated with the most effective schools was that parents and whānau were actively involved in the school and in students' learning. Whānau had a sense of connectedness and a voice in determining the long term direction of the school. The school ensured that ongoing opportunities for partnership were encouraged in order to find out and respond to the aspirations and expectations of parents and whānau* (ERO, 2010f: p.18).

School Governance: An Overview highlights how the local community's aspirations permeated the school's philosophy:

> *The school's philosophy of pono (truth), tika (honesty), and aroha (love) permeated all aspects of school life, including the high quality relationships between children, staff, trustees and the community. The board, principal and staff were committed to enhancing learning opportunities and improving outcomes for students* (ERO, 2007k: p.8).

Progress in Pacific Student Achievement (2009c) found that schools that had put energy into building relationships with Pacific parents and families believed that closer links with students' homes had contributed to improved engagement. In some cases, the school's involvement in numeracy and/or literacy projects provided opportunities

for parents to advance their own knowledge through workshops and to support their children's learning. The three most common types of initiative developed by schools were strengthened home school partnerships, increased student leadership and decision-making opportunities, and enhanced pastoral care provisions.

An example of how community aspirations became part of a school's strategic direction is given in the report *Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching:*

> *This school has over 200 students, 90 percent of whom are from the local iwi. At the beginning of 2008 the board called for an increased emphasis on science. Trustees noted that, while the local iwi own valuable forestry and fishing industries, these are mainly managed by non-Māori.*
>
> *A lack of academic qualifications and skills in science has impeded Māori from taking on key decision-making positions in industries they own. As a result, science education has become a charter priority for the school.*
>
> *It was also reflected in the school's strategic goals and principal's performance agreement. The board has required the principal to engage external consultants to help achieve these objectives.*
>
> *A science advisor has helped the school's lead teacher put together the science programme. Contact has also been made with a scientist at a local Crown Research Institute (CRI). This connection has helped develop a partnership between the CRI and the school. This partnership provides teachers and students with access to an authentic scientific context. The school receives ongoing support from the CRI in developing the science knowledge of teachers and the content of the science programme* (ERO, 2010f: p.18).

Consultation and communication

As the *Partners in learning* evaluation series (ERO, 2008a; 2008b; 2008c) found, parents and whānau expect genuine consultation and timely communication. *Schools' Readiness to Implement the New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2009f) reported that where school leaders actively sought opinions and ideas from teachers, parents, students and other community groups at an early stage, it gave all the participants a sense of ownership that provided a firm foundation for subsequent planning:

> *Discussions about the school's vision and values were particularly important, because these were the elements that characterised what the school was about and what it wanted for its learners. Members of the school community understood these and supported their inclusion in the curriculum statements. Schools that demonstrated an inclusive approach were able to use their energies to move the implementation process on rather than spending time and energy trying to convince people of its worth* (ERO, 2009f: p.10).

School Governance: An Overview (ERO, 2007k) also comments that in well-governed schools, trustees regularly seek the views of their communities about a range of school operations. Consultation was used to identify the aspirations that parents and whānau held for their children. This open and purposeful consultation contributed to the development of vision statements, strategic goals and targets for student achievement. Partnerships were strengthened through trustees' genuine commitment to listening and responding to community views:

> *Strong features of the board's practice were its extensive and effective consultation processes and community involvement. This strengthened partnerships between the board, staff and community and resulted in a shared vision and commitment to improving student achievement* (ERO, 2007k: p.10).

Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies (ERO, 2007h) provides another example of effective consultation and communication:

> *The board has high levels of consultation and communication with the school community. It has surveyed parents, students and staff on their views before setting the future direction of the school. Trustees give parents information about the school's financial and achievement performance. Parents get information through the school's website and newsletters which give a broad-brush picture of financial and student achievement information. The board and principal believe this transparency has increased the support for the changes and new directions that the school is taking* (ERO, 2007h: p.23).

The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools (ERO, 2007a) described effective consultation around assessment as a key characteristic of highly effective schools. These schools instituted purposeful and meaningful consultation with parents about how they wished to receive information about their child. Parents were made aware of why assessment activities were conducted and what the results meant for their child. They were also well informed about how the school was working to meet their child's interests, aspirations, and learning needs.

Parents were asked how the partnership between school and home could be enhanced. Effective schools monitored continuing satisfaction with the reporting process through activities like surveys, focus groups, random sampling telephone interviews and feedback during parent interviews. They also made specific efforts to meet groups of parents that had not initiated contact with teachers or who were reluctant to attend reporting evenings.

Promoting Success for Māori Students: Schools' Progress (ERO, 2010f) outlined the strategies that successful schools and boards used to consult with their Māori communities:

> *The schools sought feedback from Māori students, staff and parents through surveys and hui. Communication systems were effective and schools frequently used an open door policy and home visits. In one school, the board had a Treaty of Waitangi committee that was responsible for monitoring and improving Māori engagement* (ERO, 2010f: p.18).

Finally, *Including Students with High Needs* (ERO 2010c) also highlighted the importance of good communication and consultation. The report outlined some effective communication strategies:

> *Inclusive schools used the same sorts of communication strategies as they did for the parents and care-givers of other students. This included electronic notebooks, face-to-face communication, e-mail and phone calls to talk with parents and care-givers. ERO found that parents receiving good news about their child's day at school, was important. This information helped parents to be proud of their child. It also enhanced the working relationship between the child's family and the school* (ERO, 2010c: p.15).

Involvement

In schools where partnerships were working well, it was easy for parents, whānau and community members to come into the school and become involved in formal and informal activities and events. *Partners in Learning: Engaging Parents, Whānau and Communities* (ERO, 2008c) found that an inclusive and welcoming environment helped parents to feel comfortable and at ease in the school. In effective schools, parents' interactions with school staff, including office staff, the principal, senior managers, and teachers were positive. Being included and accepted was crucial to successful engagement.

In *Partners in Learning: Parent Voices* (ERO, 2008c), parents commented that their involvement with their children's school had a useful impact on the children's learning. They appreciated the varied opportunities for involvement with teachers, students and other parents. The following are extracts from this report:

> *Children enjoy seeing their parents at school and this provides a good incentive for them to do better at school. Positive connections between parents and teachers are also developed. This results in better communication between teachers and parents, and between the school and community as a whole. Pacific parents* (ERO, 2008c: p.16).

> *I enjoyed attending school trips with my son. It was great to get to know and meet his friends as they are all from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Overall it has been very educational for me and fun and since I now know how the school operates (its policies and community involvement). I can use this to inform myself in my second child's schooling. Chinese parent* (ERO, 2008c: p.16).

Migrant parents also interviewed for *Partners in Learning: Parents' Voices* saw the benefits in involvement with the school as a good non-threatening way of supporting their children, getting to know other people and learning about Kiwi culture. They said they enjoyed spending more time with their children, encouraging their children in their recreational activities, getting to know more about what happens at school and getting to know other parents.

Acting as parent helpers or teacher aides is one common way that parents become more fully involved in school life. Over three quarters of the schools contributing to ERO's evaluation *The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Health and Physical Education* (ERO, 2007p) used non-teaching staff and parent volunteers to support health and physical education teaching. Most of these schools had parents and community members coaching sports teams.

This description from *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2* (ERO, 2009d) outlines how parent helpers and teacher aides were integrated into the reading programme:

> *Teachers communicated effectively with other adults who helped children during reading programmes. Parent helpers or teacher aides were given focused training from the class teacher or literacy leaders. Adult helpers roved among groups to take part in word games, hear individual children read and help those still developing their independence. Some teacher aides skilfully led guided reading lessons so that children had frequent opportunities to explore and discuss texts with an adult. Regular communication between teachers, parent helpers and teacher aides ensured that all parties clearly understood how they could assist children with their reading goals* (ERO, 2009d: p.15).

Involving parents and families as part of the solution to a problem, such as truancy or bullying, is also important. *Safe Schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying* described ways that many effective schools involved parents in such processes:

> *Many schools reported that they had strategies that included parents and whānau, such as involving whānau early when issues or concerns arose; visiting homes; providing parents with the school's complaints procedure; raising community awareness of what bullying is all about; setting up family conferences and community-school seminars; and undertaking parent surveys* (ERO, 2007d: p.9).

Reporting

Schools provide reports at many levels – to students and their parents, to the board of trustees, to the community, the Ministry of Education, ERO, school proprietors and so on. Effective schools build reporting into their regular cycles of data gathering, planning and decision-making. They tailor reports to the relevant audiences so that they are clear, accurate and relevant.

In *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* (ERO, 2007a) ERO found that effective schools made it easy for parents, whānau and the wider community to access information about the school and the achievement of its students:

> *The schools presented information on assessment processes, the school's learning priorities, expectations for student achievement, and achievement trends and patterns. School websites were a useful tool for informing parents and families about school life, and in some cases, schools used websites to communicate information on students' achievements and to celebrate particular successes. Other schools used community gatherings such as meetings of the parent teacher association, boards of trustees, or school prizegivings to report to their communities* (ERO, 2007a: pp. 37–8).

Here is a further example of detailed reporting to parents from *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2:*

> *Parents were invited to the school to discuss and set goals based on information collected from school entry tests, the six-year net and other assessments. As part of formal reporting, parents and families were given accurate information about their child's reading levels. This was often accompanied by an outline of what they needed to achieve next. Daily notebooks explained ideas parents could use to support their child and provided information to help them track progress. Parents were well informed about their child's reading and progress* (ERO, 2009d: p.11).

The assessment evaluation (ERO, 2007a), however, found that the reports schools gave their communities varied in quality. In some schools the information was selective, and while useful for marketing the school, did not always present a complete picture.

In many of the schools where governance (ERO, 2007k) needed to be strengthened or improved, ERO identified meeting planning and reporting requirements as an area for improvement. This included:

- meeting requirements for annual reporting in a timely manner
- developing targets to improve student achievement
- recording baseline data so that school targets included specific and measurable objectives
- documenting a planned approach for reporting student achievement to the board
- using school-wide achievement data to establish evidence-based school improvement targets
- developing targets related to a larger proportion of the student body
- widening the scope of reporting to the board on student achievement.

Approachability and accessibility

Relationships that worked best were those that involved a two-way sharing of information. *Partners in Learning: Report of Good Practice* (ERO, 2008c) stated that when teachers understood and valued the cultural backgrounds of students and their families, partnerships were strengthened. Where personnel, such as the principal, senior managers, deans and teachers, were approachable and accessible, parents responded positively to opportunities to meet and talk. The ease with which interactions could take place influenced the nature of the relationships that supported successful engagement. Parents said that being understood and valued encouraged them to become involved because staff knew them and parents were more confident to approach them. They felt there was always someone they could talk with at the school.

Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities (ERO, 2008a) talked about successful schools and school leaders who worked to develop relationships that supported partnerships with parents and communities. These included having a collaborative and consultative approach to leadership where the views of others were heard and considered. These leaders put time and effort into getting to know the families whose children attended the school. They also expected all staff to "*demonstrate positive attitudes towards parents by being accessible, approachable and willing to develop partnerships*" (ERO, 2008a: p.15).

One of the case studies in *Partners in Learning: Report of Good Practice* exemplifies this:

> *Staff build strong relationships with parents in a variety of ways. They are accessible, friendly and caring towards families and they seek opportunities to talk with parents when they drop off and pick up their children. Parents feel they can approach staff about matters to do with their child's learning or well-being. They take an active role in their child's education and participate in the many activities available at the school* (ERO, 2008b: p.3).

A further example from this report discusses the importance of mutual respect at one case study school:

> *A strong culture of respect permeates the school. Staff are encouraged to discuss with their students and their parents what respect means. The need to listen and to be approachable, to thank parents and to use the pronoun "we" is emphasised. The principal telephones parents regularly with positive and not so positive news. Both teaching and support staff use an informal approach in their communications with parents and they know students and their families well* (ERO, 2008b: p.6).

In effective schools, considerable time and effort was put into making contact with parents and whānau/families, in both the school and the wider community. In some schools, the early development of relationships occurred through open days, visits to

contributing schools, performances and community events. Meeting teachers informally at school events, activities and sports, provided opportunities for parents to talk, ask questions and connect with their children's school lives. Parents enjoyed being involved in social and student focused activities, making it easier for relationships to be developed and nurtured.

Schools that were effective in supporting the achievement of transient students also made excellent connections with families and whānau (*Managing Transience: Good Practice in Primary Schools ERO*, 2007m). Where strong connections with families were present, family and whānau members were relaxed in their interactions with the principal and staff, even when they had experienced difficulties with the personnel from previous schools. Strong connections with families and whānau helped to support the achievement of transient students by providing:

- high quality information about students' needs
- an excellent basis for resolving any future social and educational barriers to learning
- a sense of partnership between schools and parents.

Relationships and partnerships

Good relationships with parents and whānau enable schools to develop positive learning partnerships. These relationships are the foundation of good communication between home and school and allow both parties to support each other in ways that sustain the academic and social progress of students.

Transition to school is an important time to begin building these relationships. *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities* (ERO, 2008a) states:

> *Transition-to-school processes were pivotal in the development of positive relationships. Contact on the first day of school established the link between home and school. Many parents confirmed the importance of feeling welcome, particularly on their first contact with the school, and praised school personnel such as office or reception staff for making this happen. Parents liked to be well informed and have opportunities to meet a range of school personnel. Parents benefited from effective transition processes that quickly enabled them to become part of the school community* (ERO, 2008a: p.16).

Partners in Learning: Good Practice (ERO, 2008b) explains that where partnerships were working well, the involvement of parents, whānau and communities was explicit in the school's plans and visible in its day-to-day interactions and activities. There was a clear expectation for parents to work in partnership with the school to benefit their child's learning and well-being. The school community shared this expectation. The report continues:

> *Successful engagement involved parents and whānau in decisions affecting their child. In some schools, they were involved in decisions about their child's learning goals, subject choices, class placement, and solutions to behavioural and learning matters. Parents gained confidence and trust in the school through decision-making partnerships* (ERO, 2008b: p.17).

This example from *Partners in Learning: Parents' Voices* highlights the wishes of parents of children with special needs:

> *Parents also expected to work in partnership with their child's school and to be involved in solutions to problems, rather than being blamed for things that happened. For them, working in partnership meant sharing responsibility for their child's learning and well-being* (ERO, 2008c: p.8).

The report *Managing Transience: Good Practice in Primary Schools* (ERO, 2007m), details a variety of formal and informal mechanisms schools used to build relationships with families and whānau. Informal connections were made with families at school sports and cultural events and when parents collected children from school. Examples of other processes schools used to build relationships with the families and whānau of transient students included:

- the principal phoning home after the first day and again after the first week, to catch up with families about how a new student has settled in
- three-way conferencing, ensuring that all parents attend regular goal setting and review meetings, involving the teacher and their child
- setting up times to meet with families over food (e.g., family breakfasts) to discuss the progress of children informally and to develop relationships with families. (Variations of this approach included 'Dads' breakfasts' where fathers brought their children to a school-wide breakfast with staff)
- school social workers or counsellors informally meeting with new students and/or their families in the first week or two of starting.

Promoting Pacific Student Achievement: Schools' Progress discussed how successful schools built relationships with their Pacific communities:

> *Links between schools and Pacific parents, families and communities were established through fono, home visits, newsletters in Pacific languages, personal invitations to school events, and opportunities to play an active role in activities such as bilingual programmes, sport and performing arts* (ERO, 2010b: p.14).

Links with the educational community

Effective schools see themselves as members of a wider educational community. This includes the early childhood services and contributing schools that their students come from and the schools and tertiary institutions their students will move on to, as well as the educational and support agencies in their local area.

Including Students with High Needs (ERO, 2010c) talked of the importance of building relationships between schools to manage exit and entry transitions. This report gave the example of the use of photos as part of learning story portfolios. Contributions to these portfolios could come from the student, parents, staff at the exit school or early childhood centre and staff and students at the new school.

The same report talked of the wide range of people and agencies that need to be included to get a full picture of a student's needs and strategies to meet the range of student needs:

> *For example, at one secondary school, weekly meetings occurred between an Assistant Principal, deans and the Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour. Multi-agency meetings had also been held with Group Special Education, the RTLB, Child, Youth and Family, the police, an alternative education provider, the truancy service and the school counsellor* (ERO, 2010c: p.14).

Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 report (ERO, 2009d) lists the wide range of interventions and external support that schools made use of – most common (used by 68 percent of schools in the evaluation) was Reading Recovery. Schools also used Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Literacy (RT:Lit), and Māori (RTM), Special Education Coordinators (SENCO), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teachers, early intervention support and SPELD.

In *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d) a small secondary school with approximately 350 students (Years 7 to 13) had developed links with several tertiary providers to offer specific distance courses for students. This school had kept in place most academic options for students, including non-academic options for mathematics and English. At the time of the evaluation the school was exploring additional courses in the performing arts, including music.

Science in Years 5 to 8: May 2010 Capable and Competent Teaching (ERO, 2010f) also talks of relationships with the local university as in this example:

> *The school has a close liaison with a senior science education lecturer from the local university. The lecturer has involved the school in many science-based projects and has recently been leading two teaching teams in the school to enhance the teachers' pedagogical and science knowledge. There have also been whole school learning opportunities at staff meetings for teachers to prepare their students for the science fair* (ERO, 2010f: pp.23–4).

When implementing National Standards (ERO, 2010a), three quarters of schools evaluated had made good use of use of the wider educational community to help them understand and work with the standards. Schools accessed professional development workshops, cluster meetings, on-line and print resources, web seminars and external facilitators.

Links with the wider community

When schools develop positive relationships with the many local and regional agencies, community organisations and businesses, there are many benefits for the school and for students' learning.

Partners in Learning: Engaging Parents, Whānau and Communities (ERO, 2008a) shows that successful schools had developed purposeful links with the wider community. They involved community groups and agencies inside and outside the school gates. These schools knew their communities well and took advantage of opportunities to strengthen links with the wider community. The key factors associated with effective community networks related to:

- seeking and valuing the perspectives and expertise of parents and whānau
- recognising and celebrating cultural diversity
- networking with key groups and agencies
- promoting formal community networks.

In building positive relationships with the wider community (*Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students*, ERO, 2008d), schools were able to gain specific resources and support. They gained workplaces for work experience programmes, and volunteer hours from health and counselling practitioners. Good relationships enabled the school to join initiatives connected to marae, sports clubs and other community organisations:

> *One school developed vocational programmes in both aquaculture and tourism and hospitality. High quality facilities and input from industry experts mean the programmes meet both the needs of students and local industries. Aquaculture students regularly dive and conduct marine experiments in their local area from the school's barge, which was purchased using locally raised funds. Tourism and hospitality has also proved a successful vocational option with the help of an expert from the local Institute of Technology and a facility tailor-made for those students who are either already working part-time in the local tourism or food and wine industries or thinking of pursuing a full-time career in these growing sectors of the local economy* (ERO, 2008d: pp.28–29).

Another large secondary school cited in this report used its extensive community education programme to extend its curriculum options for senior students and, simultaneously, alter the shape of the school day for students taking such courses. For some senior students the school day included classes between 3pm and 5pm or between 6pm and 9pm. The options available to senior students with the help of this extended-day programme included: computer art design, print-making, animation,

economics, law, film and TV studies, handcraft design, bone carving, weaving, kapa haka, performance music, psychology, philosophy, New Zealand history, creative writing, journalism, electronics, food and nutrition, and industrial sewing.

The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Health and Physical Education (ERO, 2007p) says that all schools in that study used outside agencies that regularly contributed to health and physical education programmes. For programmes based on movement concepts and motor skills these included regional sports trusts, sporting code groups, swimming instructors, advisors, and Sport and Recreation New Zealand. For their health programmes, schools used the New Zealand Police, The New Zealand Fire Service, Public Health nurses, dental nurses, Life Education Trust and sexuality education providers.

Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching (ERO, 2020f), gives various examples of relationships with the local community enhancing the science programme. For example, schools had used local environmental contexts and issues as a meaningful science activity. In one school, Year 6 students had helped monitor the quality of a local river over the previous seven years. The students at another school had won a prize in the Royal Society's Environmental Monitoring Action Project (EMAP) for the quality of their work in looking at local waterways.

Students in yet another school had, over the last 20 years, worked on the restoration and reforesting of a scenic lowland rainforest area. This school has also worked with the Department of Conservation to help with efforts to conserve the native kakariki.

Not all external programmes were curriculum-based. *Safe schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying* (ERO, 2007d) describes the range of programmes used to support the provision of a safe physical and emotional environment and the prevention of bullying.

Many programmes were offered by external providers, including the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the New Zealand Police. *Kia Kaha and Keeping Ourselves Safe, developed and delivered by the Youth Education Service* (YES) of the New Zealand Police, were the two most common programmes offered by primary schools but over 20 other programmes were also found in primary schools. In secondary schools, *DARE* and *Kia Kaha* were also offered along with other programmes such as, *Victory over Violence, Manu Tū,* and *Te Hui Āwhina.*

COHERENT POLICIES AND PRACTICE IN A CYCLE OF CONTINUOUS SELF REVIEW

Introduction

A feature of effective schools is that all aspects of their operations are aligned and consistent with the agreed values, aims and priorities. Thoughtful decision-making is evident from the board of trustees, through school management systems and personnel to the individual learners and groups of learners. There are high levels of respect, trust, transparency and "big picture thinking." Systems and processes are coherent, logical and clearly expressed. Decisions are made in a cycle of continuous self review and critical reflection. External critique is welcomed, carefully considered and built into planning and decision-making.

Visions, values and aims

In order to develop a set of coherent policies, procedures and practices, it is important to start with an agreed vision. This becomes the foundation which underpins all other developments. *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities* (ERO, 2008a) says that in many of the successful schools, the shared values and beliefs were clearly stated and well understood by the school's community. The report states:

> *Consultation with parents, whānau, and communities, and in some schools local iwi, established the values to be promoted throughout the school. Values were advocated that promoted respectful relationships between everybody in the school's community. The strategic intent, reflected in the vision and goals of the school, took account of parents' aspirations for their children* (ERO, 2008a: p.15).

The evaluation, *Promoting Pacific Student Achievement: Schools' Progress* (ERO, 2010b), also found that effective schools placed importance on developing strategies to create and maintain links with their communities. These links enabled them to find out, in this case, Pacific parents' views and the aspirations and values of the Pacific community so that these could be reflected in their schools' priorities.

Effective schools in *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d) demonstrated a well-developed sense of vision for what was needed – both for the school as a whole and for their senior students. Their goals were well considered, informed by community concerns and based on evidence. These goals helped provide a sense of direction for all other school activity.

Finally, *Working with National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2010a), states that schools that were making good progress towards giving effect to *The New Zealand Curriculum* had put extensive time into consultation and work into the "front end" of the curriculum. This enabled them to establish a framework based on the school's agreed vision and values from which they could develop more detailed plans and expectations.

Consultation on priorities

While schools' priorities should be determined by the needs and strengths of their students, schools also need to take into account the views and aspirations of parents, whānau and communities. In *Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies* (ERO, 2007h), ERO discusses how effective schools consulted their communities when developing their charter, shared information about student achievement and available funds, gathered information about their communities' aspirations for students and the school, and used this information to benefit their students.

The governance evaluation (*School Governance: An Overview,* ERO, 2007k) found that effective boards worked collaboratively to strengthen partnerships in the school community. They followed inclusive and responsive consultation processes and acknowledged the needs of diverse school communities. Relationships between the board, principal, staff and the school community were respectful and positive.

The National Administration Guidelines remind us that schools must, in consultation with their Māori community, develop and publicise the policies, plans and targets for specifically improving the achievement of Māori students.

Where this was working well, various reports found that schools had robust processes for consultation with and reporting to the Māori community. A variety of consultative methods, including hui, face-to-face conversations, questionnaires and interviews was used to determine the views of the Māori whānau and the community. Boards of trustees had developed close relationships with the Māori community, who were involved in setting up processes to improve the achievement of Māori students. Through consultation, the schools had developed comprehensive Māori student achievement plans that focused on tikanga curriculum overviews, literacy and numeracy plans.

An example from *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* (ERO, 2007c):

> *The achievement of Māori students was a school priority. The board used the regular reports about student achievement to review and inform its targets and goals. The principal took a personal interest in the achievement of Māori students and checked that individual support and guidance was available for those students who needed it. The curriculum reports required heads of department to consider how teachers might best meet the learning needs of Māori students. At the classroom level, teachers identified and closely monitored the achievement of Māori students* (ERO, 2007c: p.20).

Governance

In New Zealand schools, boards of trustees have overall responsibility for the successful performance of their school and for fostering student achievement. Since the implementation of a self-managing model for school governance in 1989, there

have been changes to the legislative requirements that set out how schools are governed and managed. These include an increased focus on student achievement and better community engagement to determine priorities and targets to improve student achievement.

A key feature of well-governed schools, as reported in *School Governance: An Overview,* (ERO, 2007k), was the strong focus trustees had on student learning and achievement and their commitment to improving outcomes for students. ERO's findings in this report highlight the common features of well-governed schools. In these schools:

- governance centred on students with trustees committed to improving student learning and achievement
- the principal and teachers gave trustees analysed student achievement information that was used to set realistic targets and underpin decision-making, especially in supporting professional development of staff
- strategic and annual planning had a strong focus on improving student achievement
- the principal played a key role in working with trustees and providing strong professional leadership for the board, staff and students.

The experience and expertise trustees brought to their roles strengthened their decision-making capacity. Effective trustees were clear about and shared an understanding of their roles and responsibilities. Regular, focused board training also had a positive impact on the quality of governance. In approximately 60 percent of schools in the governance report above, ERO found that boards were governing their schools well. In well-governed schools trustees:

- have an explicit focus on student learning and achievement supported by strong professional leadership
- bring experience and expertise to their roles and share an understanding of their roles and responsibilities
- strengthen partnerships in the school community through respectful relationships
- implement inclusive and responsive consultation processes that acknowledge diverse school communities
- are involved in strategic and annual planning that focuses on improving student achievement
- use robust self-review processes to evaluate identified aspects of school performance and to contribute to ongoing improvement
- have sound financial, property and personnel policies and procedures to guide the management of these resources.

In 2007, ERO reported on a cluster review of schools affected by school closures and amalgamations in Invercargill (ERO, 2007l). The evaluation commented on effective governance. Key strengths for these schools included the development of positive and

cooperative environments for staff, supportive appraisal processes focused on improving teaching and learning, school-wide guidelines for curriculum management and good systems for monitoring and reviewing school policies. There were well documented and implemented procedures for finances and day-to-day operations. There was also evidence of appropriate consultation processes with the community.

The relationship between the indicators of good governance and student achievement is complex and indirect. Good performance against such indicators does not in itself lead to high levels of student achievement. However, poor governance is more likely to correlate with lower than expected levels of achievement.

In seven percent of the schools in the school governance report (ERO, 2007k), ERO identified aspects of governance that needed significant improvement. In many of these schools, trustees lacked understanding of their roles and responsibilities, which affected their ability to govern the school. Other issues identified by ERO included:

- poor personnel management practices
- a lack of good quality, analysed student achievement information for board decision-making
- limited self-review processes
- a breakdown in board, principal, staff and community relationships
- risks to staff and student safety
- non-compliance with specific legislative requirements.

To conclude, the following example in *School Governance: An Overview* (ERO, 2007k) encompasses many of the features that contribute to successful governance.

> *The board was highly committed to ongoing school improvement and student achievement. Trustees were well informed about the school's progress in meeting school goals and achievement targets. They contributed a range of skills and had developed a sound framework of policies and procedures to support the management of the school. The board's effective consultation processes strengthened partnerships between the board, staff and community resulting in a shared vision and commitment to improving student achievement* (ERO, 2007k: p.11).

Coherent systems and processes

Schools are complex organisations requiring many different systems to manage the emotional, social, physical, academic, and, in many schools, spiritual needs of students. Good quality integrated systems used by effective schools were closely linked to high quality planning, analysis, monitoring and evaluation. These schools had good systems for strategic and annual planning. They also made good use of different forms of evidence to analyse and improve the performance of students and the overall performance of the school.

Including Students with High Needs says that schools that demonstrated the most inclusive practice for students with high needs had "well-organised systems, effective teamwork, and constructive relationships" (ERO, 2010b, p.14). The report continues:

> *The systems, processes and relationships at these schools worked well to identify and support the education of students with high needs. They helped people, both inside and outside the school, to identify and solve any problems, develop effective processes and/or celebrate and promote student success* (ERO, 2010b: p.14).

In *Good Practice in Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO, 2008d), the degree to which different systems worked together to support the academic and pastoral needs of senior students was a feature of effective schools. Schools needed to be well organised across different departments and faculties, and for there to be strong teamwork and cooperation between staff.

As was the case for most schools in *Good Practice in Engaging Senior Secondary Students* (ERO 2008d), a highly effective monitoring and reporting system for student attendance that provided accurate and timely data to form teachers and deans, was one of the foundations of good practice. In one school with approximately 300 to 400 students per year level, a well-designed student management system gave parents timely notification of any unexplained absences.

Routinely, the system was such that only a small number of unexplained absences required any follow up by the end of the week for each year level. The efficiency of the system meant that the school stayed on top of student attendance problems and avoided time-consuming academic, pastoral and discipline issues arising from high numbers of unexplained absences. Not only did this give school staff time to concentrate on the small number of unexplained absences, but it left more time to concentrate on the core business of teaching and learning. Good systems enable schools to manage change more effectively.

Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case studies (ERO, 2007h, p6) states:

> *The environment in which schools operate is dynamic. Where possible schools need to be able to anticipate and plan for a range of possible scenarios, including:*
>
> - *changes to decile rating;*
> - *changes to staffing;*
> - *demographic changes;*
> - *changes to the school roll;*
> - *changes to international student enrolments;*
> - *changes to employment opportunities in the community;*
> - *the impact and uptake of new technology; and*
> - *changes in parental expectations of the school.*

Communicating systems and processes is also important to ensure their effectiveness as expressed in the excerpt from *Safe Schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying:*

> *The implementation of policies, procedures, plans and programmes was most effective when expectations and processes were shared with the wider school community through newsletters and information evenings as well as through informal contact. The value of everyone knowing the expectations, rules and processes to be followed was highlighted in many of the reports. Students reported that teacher consistency in implementing policies and procedures was important in creating a positive learning environment* (ERO, 2007d: p.9).

Financial decision-making

Schools need robust processes for selecting, prioritising and evaluating areas for expenditure. In *Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case studies report* (ERO, 2007h), ERO found most schools had satisfactory financial systems and were in a satisfactory financial position.

While the day-to-day running of schools was being managed efficiently, however, the links between financial and strategic planning and boards' knowledge of student needs – gained through student assessment and evaluation information – were weak. As a result, a board's knowledge of student achievement often did not drive its financial decision-making.

School Governance: An Overview (ERO, 2007k) also highlighted the importance of sound management of finances, assets and property by boards to ensure they supported effective teaching and learning. In this report, effective trustees used finances to target staff professional development and appropriate teaching resources to support student learning as in these examples:

> *The board's sound financial and property management enabled it to maintain ongoing school improvements. The curriculum was well resourced. Property developments in student support services and careers, and health and physical education were evidence of the board's resolve to provide a high quality educational environment.*
>
> *The board placed priority on teachers receiving extensive professional development in numeracy and literacy. Whole-school professional development promoted consistency and sustainability of new initiatives. This also contributed to a positive environment, where adults worked collegially to improve student learning* (ERO, 2007k: p.11).

Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies (ERO, 2007h) reminds us that school leaders, managers and trustees are often faced with difficult choices. Sometimes different groups of people, such as parents and teachers, have differing priorities.

The report suggests that ideally schools should base their selection of projects on what they know about their students and their achievements, and prioritise spending on what is most likely to benefit the students.

This report (ERO, 2007h) also found that schools managed and responded differently to challenges to their financial management. Effective schools remained focused on using their operational funding to benefit their students, while less effective schools tended to develop short-term responses that had little to do with the wellbeing of the students. Effective schools do not view financial management as separate from teaching and learning. Effective financial management is fundamental to schools achieving their strategic goals. The report commented that high performing schools know this and can describe how their current financial decisions will promote the achievement of their students.

Schools' financial decision-makers also need to anticipate and manage internal and external factors that may affect the financial stability of their school. These factors include changes in school rolls, reduction in locally raised funds, staff changes and increased overhead costs. They can have a significant impact on the amount of money schools have to spend on projects aimed at promoting student achievement.

Not all school boards or management teams have members with strong financial skills. *Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies* outlined how some schools worked to address identified gaps in their collective financial management knowledge and skills by:

- providing senior staff and/or trustees with professional development in financial management (for example, financial policies and procedures, the development of reserves, depreciation, financial monitoring and analysing accounts, etc)
- sourcing external financial expertise to advise the board and the principal
- employing a staff member with financial expertise
- using support agencies.

Strategic thinking and planning

Effective schools know their communities and students. They collect a range of information about their students' achievements, consult regularly with their communities and then use this information to make decisions about how to best determine their strategic plans and spend their operational funding.

Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies (ERO, 2007h) explains that a school's strategic plan should provide the framework for all other planning:

> *… in areas such as professional development, ICT, curriculum development, annual planning and plans for Māori student achievement. All plans should link to the goals in the strategic plan, providing a rationale for any expenditure* (ERO, 2007h: p.4).

A description of one school in this report:

> *Annual, strategic, classroom and professional development planning were aligned. There was a focus on student achievement throughout all planning documents. All plans were based on information about student achievement* (ERO, 2007h: p.5).

In well-governed schools, as reported in the *School governance report* (ERO, 2007k), trustees established clear strategic direction that reflected community aspirations. Measurable and appropriate targets for improved student achievement were set annually and progress towards these targets was regularly monitored. Trustees had a strong mandate for raising student achievement that was underpinned by high expectations for all learners.

An example from *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools: Good Practice in Secondary Schools*

> *The board of trustees developed high quality strategic plans that linked to detailed school-wide guidelines about the purpose of assessment. The board articulated its commitment to excellent teaching and academic success, and was supported by a clear direction for implementation of all operational areas that had an impact on student achievement. Specific data-based goals defined actions, responsibilities and performance indicators that provided a sound basis for monitoring progress. Student achievement targets focused on establishing school-wide literacy programmes to raise the academic achievement of students* (ERO, 2007c: p.8).

This example from *The Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies* shows how one school used an evidence-based approach to its strategic planning and implementation:

> *The school drew on a strong evidence base to understand the strengths and weaknesses students brought to the school. This information had been built up from contact with early childhood providers, frequent discussions with parents and ongoing assessment of each student. It included data from all essential learning areas. Teachers used this information in their planning and to support student learning. Teachers linked their classroom planning to the school's professional development, annual and strategic plans. This gave the school a consistent focus on student achievement throughout all their planning activities* (ERO, 2007h: pp.26-27).

This final example is from *School Governance: An Overview:*

> *Trustees made good use of well-analysed student achievement information provided to them to inform planning and to resource decision-making. Well considered decisions were made based on comprehensive information from a range of sources* (ERO, 2007k: p.10).

Self review

Self review is emerging as a strong indicator of an effective school. ERO does not have a rigid view of what self review should look like but expects that schools will have robust processes in place that integrate: (a) strategic self review; (b) regular self reviews; and, where necessary, (c) emergent self reviews, in an ongoing cycle focused on continuous improvement.

School Governance: An Overview (ERO, 2007k) found that well-governed schools had a strong culture of formal (strategic) self review:

> *Trustees were knowledgeable about student achievement and set focused targets for improvement. They used assessment evidence to plan and resource school operations. A strong culture of self review resulted in regular evaluation of all aspects of management and governance to facilitate better outcomes for students* (ERO, 2007k: p.10).

In effective schools, ongoing review provided a sound basis for decision-making. Regular evaluation of all aspects of management and governance was planned and findings used to inform strategic direction. Self-review processes were well embedded and robust in evaluating school performance and contributing to ongoing improvement, as in one example from this report:

> *Rigorous systems of self review, linked to the planning and reporting cycle, led to continuous improvement in teaching practice and board governance. A capable board made sound resourcing decisions with a focus on student achievement. Thorough self review and school operations systems strengthened governance practices* (ERO, 2007k: p.11).

The second report on *Readiness to Implement The New Zealand Curriculum* (ERO, 2009f) found that a critical driver in successful curriculum design, implementation and delivery was the effectiveness of the school's self review or inquiry processes. These processes operated from board to classroom level but essentially focused on evidence about what needed to change to help students learn.

Schools that were well advanced with design and implementation were basing their decisions on evidence gathered as part of various internal (regular) review processes. In the context of the national curriculum, they were using this information to help them tailor their school curriculum to what was already working well for them, to what they saw as priorities for their learners, and to the local resources and opportunities available to them.

The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools gives this example of ongoing regular self review using student achievement data in a primary school:

> *A continuous cycle of self review means the school is well-placed to ensure improvement in achievement outcomes for students as well as individuals and collectively in year levels. The school has valid information on student achievement from the collated data that is used by teachers and reported to trustees and parents.*

> *Teachers have a sound awareness of student achievement across the school and recognise their own role in improving achievement* (ERO, 2007a: p.32).

In Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2 report ERO makes the point that self review can support the many significant investment decisions about personnel and material resources that boards make:

> *They [boards] need to know how well their investments are working. Where school review processes were not robust, trustees lacked the necessary information to make or approve these decisions. In effective schools, trustees received valuable information through well-planned interventions so they knew what worked best and whether they needed to look at other options* (ERO, 2009d: p.3).

In *School Governance: An Overview* (ERO, 2007k), ERO identified self review as a key area for improvement in the majority of schools where governance could be strengthened. Schools needed to formalise and develop self-review practice as well as undertake regular, ongoing and systematic evaluation of school performance. Practices identified by ERO to improve self review included:

- developing a formal, robust and rigorous process for self review
- basing self review on the objectives and targets in the school's strategic and annual plans
- using self-review findings to contribute to strategic planning.

Linked to this, the recent report *Promoting Success for Māori Students: Schools' Progress* does not paint a good picture of how schools use self review to improve Māori student achievement:

> *Despite the widespread information and support available, a substantial proportion of schools do not review their own performance in relation to Māori student achievement. These schools do not make effective use of data to improve classroom programmes and school-wide systems to promote success for Māori. Nor do they use research about Māori students learning to guide their curriculum review and pedagogical development* (ERO, 2010f: p.1).

External perspectives

External perspectives on how well schools are performing are provided formally and informally. They can be legislated (as in an ERO review), requested (as in the use of external consultants) or provided without invitation (as in media reports). Effective schools take note of such feedback, considering what they can learn from them before building important findings and perspectives into their strategic planning.

School Governance: An Overview (ERO, 2007k) found that effective governance was characterised by taking note and making improvements as a result of external feedback such as ERO review report recommendations. This excerpt highlights the use of external support and training for boards to build on this feedback:

> *Trustees sought regular and ongoing training that targeted specific aspects of board operations. Training supported trustees in their roles and responsibilities, helped them keep up to date with change and in the induction of new trustees, and to plan for successive boards. In some schools, training had been undertaken to help the board address issues raised in a previous ERO report* (ERO, 2007k: p.9).

In this example from *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* NZQA is the external agency providing feedback. The school uses this external critique as part of its ongoing cycle of school self review:

> *Strong curriculum management systems supported the school-wide development of good quality assessment. Assessment expectations were well documented and ensured consistency across all curriculum areas. There were robust internal and external moderation processes. Internal audit of departments and subjects conducted in the years that the NZQA did not conduct a Managing National Assessment review, ensured that assessment policies were followed consistently. The school used external moderation not only to gauge school progress against national means, but to provide rigour to critique the development of new internal curriculum programmes. This resulted in the development of alternative programmes that best met the diverse learning needs of students* (ERO, 2007c: p.8).

Sometimes the critique is less formal as in this example from *Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of Not Achieving*:

> *At a large, urban, decile 10 primary school, staff had data showing that students in Years 5 and 6 were not reading at the expected level. A strategy was developed to support classroom teachers and provide targeted professional learning. An external trainer was brought in specifically to assist the teachers to develop group-teaching strategies. The training involved the whole staff, but extended to the trainer and the school's group of literacy leaders working with teachers. The trainer and literacy leaders provided teachers with models of good practice and observed them using particular strategies in class. They gave teachers formative feedback on the quality of their implementation* (ERO, 2008e: pp. 21-22).

In this example, also from *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information: Good Practice in Secondary Schools* the school conducts its own audits and, if necessary, commissions external critique to feed into its self-review process:

> *A comprehensive and rigorous audit of each faculty was undertaken triennially. This included the evaluation of student progress and achievement, documentation, implementation of programmes, and assessment practices. Information was gathered through lesson observations, student surveys and teacher interviews. The audit included an assessment moderator's report. In some curriculum areas where specialist expertise was required, external auditors were included in the team. Recommendations were formulated to guide further faculty planning and development of assessment* (ERO, 2007c: p.17).

Conclusion

This analysis and synthesis of 36 national evaluations and reports of good practice focusing on the schooling sector, completed by ERO between 2007 and 2010, provides an insight into what ERO knows about effective schools. The five characteristics discussed in this report emphasise the importance of evidence-based decision-making that, first and foremost, focuses on the learner. Schools do this by:

- meeting learner potential through a careful analysis of needs, progress and achievement
- promoting leadership in an inclusive culture
- enhancing effective teaching
- engaging with their communities
- implementing coherent policies and practices in a cycle of continuous self review.

These characteristics resonate with many findings from recent educational research conducted both in New Zealand and overseas. This synthesis, however, stresses that these characteristics do not exist in isolation from each other but need to be integrated appropriately into schools' long-term visions, medium-term plans and short-term strategies.

This synthesis also highlights that each school will address the needs of its learners and the aspirations of its community in different ways. Schools will need to use self review and external review or feedback to decide the right balance of these characteristics for their current and projected situations.

When schools are undertaking their own self review or preparing for external review, this report, *Evaluation at a Glance: What ERO Knows About Effective Schools*, along with ERO's *Evaluation Indicators for School Reviews* (ERO, 2011a) and *Framework for School Reviews* (ERO, 2011b) will be a resource for schools. It also contributes to the growing body of knowledge in New Zealand about high quality education and how to work towards that – the ultimate goal.

APPENDIX 1

Appendix 1: ERO reports used in this synthesis

(2007a). *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007b). *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools: Good Practice in Primary Schools.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007c). *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools: Good Practice in Secondary Schools.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007d). *Safe Schools: Strategies to Prevent Bullying.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007e). *The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Writing.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007f). *The Teaching of Writing: Good Practice in Years 4 and 8. Wellington: ERO.*

(2007g). *The Teaching of Mathematics: Good Practice.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007h). *Schools' Use of Operational Funding: Case Studies.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007i). *The Ongoing and Reviewable Resources Schemes: Good Practice.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007j). *The Teaching of Social Studies: Good Practice.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007k). *School Governance: An Overview.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007l). *Invercargill Schools Cluster Report.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007m). *The Teaching of Sexuality Education in Years 7-13.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007n). *Managing Transience: Good Practice in Primary Schools.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007o). *Review of Curriculum Materials to Support the Teaching and Learning of Te Reo Māori.* Wellington: ERO.

(2007p). T*he Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Health and Physical Education.* Wellington: ERO.

(2008a). *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities.* Wellington: ERO.

(2008b). *Partners in Learning: Case Studies.* Wellington: ERO.

(2008c). *Partners in Learning: Parent Voices.* Wellington: ERO.

(2008d). *Good Practice in Supporting and Engaging Senior Secondary Students.* Wellington: ERO.

(2008e). *Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of Not Achieving*. Wellington: ERO.

(2008f). *Schools' Provision for Gifted and Talented Students*. Wellington: ERO.

(2008g). *Boys' Education: Good Practice in Secondary Schools*. Wellington: ERO.

(2008h). *The Quality of Teaching in Kura Māori*. Wellington: ERO.

(2009a). *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Primary Schools*. Wellington: ERO.

(2009b). *Managing Professional Learning and Development in Secondary Schools*. Wellington: ERO.

(2009c). *Progress in Pacific Student Achievement. A Pilot Evaluation of Auckland Schools*. Wellington: ERO.

(2009d). *Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2*. Wellington: ERO.

(2009e). *Schools' Readiness to Implement the New Zealand Curriculum [1]*. Wellington: ERO.

(2009f). *Schools' Readiness to Iimplement the New Zealand Curriculum [2]*. Wellington: ERO.

(2010a). *Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: ERO.

(2010b). *Promoting Pacific Student Achievement: Schools' Progress*. Wellington: ERO.

(2010c). *Including Students with High Needs*. Wellington: ERO.

(2010d). *Preparing to Give Effect to The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: ERO.

(2010e). *Science in Years 5 to 8: Capable and Competent Teaching*. Wellington: ERO.

(2010f). *Promoting Success for Māori Students: Schools' Progress*. Wellington: ERO.

OTHER ERO DOCUMENTS

(2011a). *Evaluation indicators for schools (Draft)*. Wellington: ERO.

(2011b). *Framework for School Reviews (Draft)*. Wellington: ERO.

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