

Increasing educational achievement in secondary schools



August 2013

relationships included information
achievement developed number qualifications
competencies additional responsive report teachers
challenges ncea data career improve level 2 positive
increased credits individual progress challenges
ero focus level 1 ministry education management percent
initiatives schools monitoring practices respond
success tracking used staff students opportunities pathways
support systems target

Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the Heart of the Matter



Published 2013

© Crown copyright

Education Evaluation Reports

ISBN 978-0-47838962-3 (word)

ISBN 978-0-47838963-0 (PDF)

ISBN 978-0-47838964-7 (html)

ISBN 978-0-47838965-4 (pbk.)

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

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



Foreword

The Education Review Office (ERO) is an independent government department that reviews the performance of New Zealand's schools and early childhood services, and reports publicly on what it finds.

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

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

In our daily work we have the privilege of going into early childhood services and schools, giving us a current picture of what is happening throughout the country. We collate and analyse this information so that it can be used to benefit the education sector and, therefore, the children in our education system. ERO's reports contribute sound information for work undertaken to support the Government's policies.

This report presents the findings of ERO's evaluation of a short-term initiative to support improved achievement of a target cohort of Year 12 students in 16 schools. These were students who were at risk of not achieving the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 by the end of 2012. The report identifies the useful practices that these schools have demonstrated in the course of this work and the results are encouraging.

Successful delivery in education relies on many people and organisations across the community working together for the benefit of children and young people. We trust the information in ERO's evaluations will help them in their work.

Diana Anderson
Acting Chief Review Officer
Education Review Office
August 2013

Contents

OVERVIEW	1
NEXT STEPS	3
INTRODUCTION	4
METHODOLOGY	6
FINDINGS	7
Good Practice	7
Challenges and opportunities	15
CONCLUSION	18
NEXT STEPS	19
APPENDIX 1: THE CAREER MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES	20

Overview

In September and October of 2012 a group of 16 schools identified a target cohort of Year 12 students who were at risk of not achieving the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2 by the end of 2012. This was part of a Ministry of Education focus on the *Better Public Services* goal of 85 percent of 18-year-olds achieving NCEA Level 2, or an equivalent qualification, by 2017.

Schools were also asked what might be achieved if they focused their efforts on these students. The Ministry did not prescribe strategies which schools should use to help learners achieve, but encouraged schools to find their own, local solutions.

NCEA achievement data collated for each of the target students at the 16 schools indicated that 189 of the 311 target students, or 61 percent, achieved NCEA Level 2 by the end of 2012. Another 31 percent remained at school in 2013. Eight percent did not gain NCEA Level 2 and did not return to school. Approximately 64 percent of the Māori students targeted, and 62 percent of the Pacific students targeted, gained NCEA Level 2 in 2012.

These results are encouraging although it is difficult to judge how many of these students would have achieved NCEA Level 2 regardless of any intervention. It is, however, possible to identify the useful practices that schools have demonstrated in the course of this work. These practices are the focus of this report.

In this evaluation ERO visited 13 of the 16 schools to investigate the nature and the quality of practices schools used. ERO found that, in many cases, the strategies used by these schools align with other examples of responsive schooling identified by ERO.¹ These included:

- individualised learning and support given to students
- careful tracking and monitoring of student achievement
- positive relationships developed with students and their families
- robust review and improvement of teaching and support initiatives.

To help all schools make the most of these useful practices, this report includes specific examples of good practice along with self-review questions. Schools should use these materials to consider their own responsiveness to students.

Schools made a focused effort for individual students. Whether it was the motivation to achieve a particular school target, or the initiatives taken by some teachers, the attempts by schools to ‘find a way’ for as many individuals in the target cohort as possible shows something of what can be done to improve the achievement of some students, even in the very short term.

1 ERO (2013) *Secondary schools: Pathways for future education, training and employment*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

PAGE 2

Schools identified a number of positive impacts of their work in 2012. These included:

- gains in individual student achievement and NCEA qualifications
- raising staff and student expectations of what could be achieved (even in a relatively short space of time) and a weakening of the idea that failure was the student's fault
- greater staff awareness of the issues facing at-risk students and priority learners at their school and the specific challenges students faced in achieving NCEA qualifications
- more talk among students about gaining credits, including merit and excellence endorsements and the targets they needed to reach
- students having a better understanding of themselves as successful learners
- positive changes in some students' attitudes towards NCEA and school
- the increased retention of individual students into Year 13.

Following the discussion of the beneficial practices of schools, this report identifies some of the challenges and opportunities presented by the pilot. There are, for example, challenges related to which credits are gained by students. ERO found, at a few of the schools, too great a focus on credit acquisition - potentially at the expense of supporting students' identified pathways to future education, training and employment.

The 16 schools now have an opportunity to modify and expand the target cohorts they focus on. While the nominal focus was on students aiming to achieve NCEA Level 2, potentially more gains could be made if schools also focus on students who disengage before they have achieved NCEA Level 1, including those in Years 9 and 10.

An ongoing challenge for the schools involved in this initiative, and for other schools who set out to improve their NCEA achievement, is ensuring that the useful practices and achievements gained with a target cohort of students, and typically involving a minority of staff, can be scaled up and implemented more broadly across their schools.

Next steps

On the basis of this report, ERO recommends that all secondary schools:

- review the quality of tracking and monitoring of students working towards NCEA qualifications to ensure that the progress of all students is subject to regular scrutiny throughout the year
- identify students whose achievement is below that expected and/or is inconsistent with their intended pathway to future education, training and employment, and ensure that an appropriate range of solutions and support processes are established
- review the extent to which their academic programme, including the programmes and opportunities that exist with external providers, is responsive to the identified career pathways of their students
- review the extent to which the families of students at risk of underachievement are well informed about the progress of their children and included as partners in processes to support student success.

Introduction

In 2012 the Government set out its priorities for education as part of *Better Public Services*. Under the heading *Boosting skills and employment* the Ministry has set the following targets:

- 85 percent of 18-year-olds will have achieved NCEA Level 2 or equivalent qualification by 2017
- 55 percent of 25-34 year olds will have a qualification at NCEA Level 4 or above.

To achieve the NCEA Level 2 target New Zealand schools must significantly increase their current levels of achievement. In 2012, 74.3 percent of school leavers achieved NCEA Level 2 (or equivalent). The Government has put in place a range of initiatives to support the achievement of secondary students. This includes the work connected with Youth Guarantee, Trades and Service Academies, and Secondary Tertiary Programmes (STPs).

In September and October of 2012, 16 schools worked with the Ministry of Education to identify a target cohort of Year 12 students who, without additional support, were unlikely to achieve NCEA Level 2 in 2012. The Ministry indicated that schools should target students who were likely to fall within 20 credits of the NCEA Level 2 requirements.

Schools were encouraged to find their own, local solutions to lift achievement for these students. In essence, schools were challenged to ‘find a way’ to respond to the individual circumstances of each student in their target cohort.

This approach differs from many other initiatives in its emphasis on ‘solutions for each student’. Many other initiatives designed to improve student achievement operate from the school-wide perspective first, with the intention that school practices will subsequently develop to meet the needs of students.

The achievement results from across the 16 schools linked to this ‘focus on the individual’ are encouraging. They show that out of the 311 target students 189 (61 percent) achieved NCEA Level 2 in 2012. A further 31 percent of students returned to school in 2013. Eight percent did not gain NCEA Level 2 and did not return to school. A total of 64 percent of the Māori students, and 62 percent of the Pacific students, gained NCEA Level 2 in 2012.

These numbers suggest that schools have made a difference for some students. Many of these students who were targeted because it was judged that they would not achieve

NCEA Level 2 in 2012 without additional support did, in fact, gain the Level 2 qualification.

It is difficult to quantify the impact of this work on student achievement. Whatever schools put in place for this initiative cannot be separated from other initiatives already underway in these schools – for example: *He Kākano*,² *Positive Behaviour for Learning*³ (PB4L) and *Starpath*.⁴ This is also the reason that this report concentrates on the good practices observed by ERO.

The school-wide NCEA achievement information also suggests that there has not been a clear increase in the overall levels of achievement at the target schools. In considering the NCEA Level 2 data from 2010 through to 2012, for students in years 12 and 13, only five of the schools showed an overall lift in achievement. Six of the schools showed little change in their school-wide NCEA achievement and, in the remaining schools, achievement decreased slightly.

Another complicating factor is the inconsistency across schools in the students who were targeted. Some schools selected only students who were likely to fall within 20 credits of achieving NCEA Level 2. Other schools selected students who were likely to miss achieving NCEA Level 2 by more considerable margins. Some of the schools also dropped one or more students from the target cohort and did not include their numbers in the final count of students who did or did not achieve NCEA.⁵

A few schools were focused on improving the achievement of cohorts of Year 11 (NCEA Level 1) students, while also selecting some students attempting NCEA Level 2. This focus on Year 11 students completing NCEA Level 1 was a priority for these schools before Ministry of Education involvement. These schools saw NCEA Level 1 as a gateway to success at higher levels. As one staff member reported: *‘The change in attitudes once they have tasted success is remarkable.’*

- 2 He Kākano is a professional learning programme for secondary and area school leadership teams. The programme focuses on growing culturally responsive school leadership.
- 3 Positive Behaviour for Learning is a Ministry of Education initiative that supports schools to create a culture where positive behaviour thrives. Participating schools go through a stepped process to find out why students are behaving a certain way, and then allow all the students and wider school community to come up with solutions.
- 4 The Starpath Project is a University of Auckland research project. The focus of the research is on New Zealand students currently under-achieving in the secondary system and under-represented in tertiary education. It aims to address New Zealand's comparatively high rate of educational inequality, with Māori and Pacific Island students, and students from low socio-economic backgrounds showing significant rates of educational underachievement compared with their peers.
- 5 ERO identified that in five schools there were small differences between the number of students counted in the achievement information given to the Ministry and the number of students who started off in the cohort. These differences were between one and three students.

Methodology

This report focuses on the good practices of schools in support of a target cohort of year 12 students attempting NCEA Level 2. In collecting information for this report, ERO asked the following questions:

1. What did schools do in identifying and responding to their target cohort?
2. What impacts were achieved?
3. What was learnt by the school?
4. What changes have been sustained in the school's operations?

These questions supported review officers to collect information about the involvement of families and whānau, school approaches to data analysis, the types of credits gained by students, pastoral and careers systems in support of students, educational initiatives that supported target students, and the sustainability of the systems schools had developed during this project.

During Term 1, 2013 teams of ERO reviewers visited the 13 of the 16 schools that had agreed to be part of a good practice evaluation. The schools visited were decile 1 to 7 schools. During these visits ERO:

- spoke with the principal and other leaders with oversight of this work
- interviewed groups of students affected by the project
- met with any staff who have continued this work in 2013 or who have developed initiatives linked to what the school has learnt from being involved in this project
- discussed with a few family or whānau members any significant benefits for their child that they had observed
- examined documentation, including any self-review material, the school had already prepared related to this project
- considered any other evidence or examples of ongoing good practice, benefits or developments linked to this project.

Findings

The findings section of this report focuses on the good practices of the targeted schools. These practices are consistent with those found by ERO in other evaluations.⁶ They are discussed under the following headings:

- responding to individual students
- building positive relationships with students and their families
- tracking and monitoring student progress
- reviewing and improving teaching and support initiatives.

The report also includes a set of self-review questions that can be used by schools to reflect on and improve their responsiveness to individual students.

The findings section finishes with a discussion of the challenges linked to this work. Key challenges include the importance of schools using student pathways as a basis for improving NCEA outcomes and the need for schools to develop sustainable, whole-school approaches to student achievement.

GOOD PRACTICE

Responding to individual students

The 13 schools in this evaluation have generally gained a greater sense of urgency in fostering student achievement. ERO found examples of schools developing practice more responsive to the individual academic, pastoral and careers needs of their target cohort. As one school leader said *“we’ve suddenly started talking about students”*.

The process usually began by each target student having an individual plan of action. The students were interviewed by staff and specific goals were developed about attendance and achievement. In many cases this planning also included the preferred career pathway of the student and the NCEA credits that supported this pathway.

Most of these schools also placed a greater emphasis on the pastoral wellbeing of students. Schools, for example, responded more quickly to issues such as behaviour and attendance. In one school the focus on pastoral wellbeing was extended to some students having transport paid for and resources, such as uniforms and calculators, provided.

In the classrooms, some teachers had modified their normal programmes to better suit the pathways of individual students. In some schools, department heads modified the credits available in particular courses, including offering additional supplementary credits better suited to the students’ needs.

⁶ ERO (2013) *Secondary schools: Pathways for future education, training and employment*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

PAGE 8

Most of the schools increased the range of additional learning opportunities and support strategies for students. Specific examples of these included:

- catch-up sessions in the lunch break, evenings, holidays and study break, with food often available
- immediate attention to students who missed work or fell behind
- producing templates to support student note-taking
- opportunities for students to work cooperatively in groups and pairs in preparation for individual assessments
- a buddy system for peer support in class
- phone-text reminders to students about examinations.

One school ensured that there was a focus early in the year on literacy and numeracy credits and placed a second teacher in mathematics and English classes to allow for more attention for individual students.

Through their focus on individual students, some schools realised that there were uneven levels of internal assessment through the school year. These schools subsequently identified the need for a more planned approach to internal assessment with more assessment opportunities occurring earlier in the year.

IMPROVING ACHIEVEMENT AT ONE URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOL

This school had already developed a target cohort when approached by the Ministry in September 2012. During 2011, the school had focused on improving its NCEA Level 1 results, which showed a marked improvement by the end of that year. In 2012, the school focused on 23 students who had achieved Level 1 with the aim of getting each of these students through NCEA Level 2. Results showed that 18 of the 23 students achieved NCEA Level 2, with another two students, who had yet to achieve NCEA Level 2, returning to school in 2013. The improvements shown in the target cohort were also reflected in significant increases in the number of other students achieving NCEA Level 1 and 2.

The focus on this cohort occurred in a school-wide context where several professional development projects improved staff focus on the needs of individual learners. These projects included:

- *He Kākano* and the *Te Kotahitanga*⁷ *Effective Teaching Profile*
- School-wide *PB4L*
- Information communication technology (ICT) professional development project that had assisted teachers to more effectively analyse and use student achievement information.

⁷ Te Kotahitanga is a research and development programme that supports teachers and school leaders to improve Māori students' engagement and achievement.

Direct academic support for the target students included subject teachers establishing evening classes, lunch-time catch-up sessions and immediate individual support for students who had been absent. The school placed additional focus on students achieving literacy and numeracy credits, placing additional staffing into English and mathematics classes. Teachers used exemplars to set clear expectations for what students needed to know and be able to do to achieve NCEA standards, and gave students templates to support their note-taking study skills. School holidays were used to catch students up and only students who had achieved the set number of credits were eligible for study leave later in the year.

Across the school, pastoral support was provided for students through form-group teachers who had small vertical groups of approximately 10 students. These teachers developed good relationships with parents and made contact when pastoral or behavioural issues arose at school, as well as when there was reason to celebrate success. The parents of the target cohort became very involved in their child's education as they increased their knowledge of NCEA and recognised the efforts of staff. Parents who ERO talked to described significant attitude changes in their adolescent children and the improved focus they developed on achievement.

Over the two years of this work teachers have considerably improved their tracking and monitoring of student achievement. They have spent much more time celebrating student achievement, and making these achievements known to the parents of individual students. Teachers have become more focused on individual student programmes and seen the value in Gateway, the Services' Academy and connections with tertiary education. The school's achievement targets have been increased for 2013 as part of an overall strategy of building on the efforts of 2011 and 2012.

RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS – SELF-REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Which students at our school require additional support? Who are these students and what support do they need? Do we currently provide that support?

What processes exist at our school to identify and support individual learners who need support? How well do the academic, pastoral and careers aspects of our school work together for each of these students?

To what extent do we have systems in place to respond quickly and effectively to students whose attendance, behaviour and/or learning are not on track?

Building positive relationships with students and their families

Many of the schools already had a focus on building positive relationships with students and their families. This was often supported by ongoing participation in initiatives such as *He Kāhano* and *PB4L*. Many of these schools were also focused on particular cohorts of students and had approaches in place to develop positive, constructive relationships, especially between some staff and students at risk of underachievement.

From this starting point, most of the schools in this evaluation developed their relationships with their target cohorts by providing a mentor or support teacher who closely monitored student progress. Sometimes this role was taken by a dean, while in some schools students were assigned to particular teachers. These teachers assisted students to navigate the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) and to develop strategies for achieving their educational and pathway goals. The mentor teachers advocated for students. For example, they worked with subject teachers to extend deadlines, accept resubmitted work, or to provide additional assessment opportunities for students who had been absent. The mentors also brokered extra teaching support from some subject teachers.

Staff in these mentor roles were more likely to use a ‘problem-solving’ approach with students, rather than a critical or punitive manner. The approach was much more about ‘*how can we fix this?*’ rather than ‘*what has gone wrong now?*’ From this basis, staff concentrated on helping students to develop positive attitudes and raise their expectations for achievement.

In some of the schools, the strong relationships between staff and students were also reflected in the close liaison between school personnel and the families of students. This meant, for example, that parents were included in a team effort to support student achievement. Parents became more involved by attending meetings about their student’s progress and goals. They were given additional information about NCEA, which helped them to monitor their teenager’s progress. Regular communication with parents was maintained by schools through phone calls, email, Facebook and texting. In one school, teachers visited homes and worked with students in holiday time.

SMALL SCHOOL FLEXIBILITY IN MEETING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

This example describes the responsive practice of an Area school (Years 1–13) with a small senior secondary cohort. Because of the composite nature of the school, most of the students were very well known to staff. Good relationships between staff and students formed a starting point for good support for individual students.

Each secondary student, from Year 11 onwards has a staff mentor. Students have used this relationship to set goals for their achievement and their future pathways.

Students take responsibility for reporting back to teachers and their parents through the regular up-to-date reports on progress towards meeting their goals. A weekly meeting of senior staff discusses any students at risk of underachievement.

Students in the senior school receive one-to-one careers support. A careers unit in Year 10 provides students with the opportunity to explore their future interests and identify possible pathways. Field trips to the nearest university and a local polytechnic have helped students explore their options. At the end of the year each Year 10 student is interviewed to ensure that there is a good alignment between their Year 11 subject choices and their identified pathways. Ongoing contact with the school's careers advisor and their teacher-mentor means that pathways continue to be a focus through Years 11 to 13.

The school has a flexible, 10-day timetable that accommodates differing student needs. Courses are delivered to small multi-level classes. Teachers tailor the content of the programme to individual students meaning that students can focus on aspects that relate most closely to their pathway.

The school's curriculum has drawn on external providers to ensure that each student's programme is relevant to their future. Secondary and tertiary external providers have been used, including Te Aho o Te Kura Pounamu (The Correspondence School). The school has accessed learning materials through video conference as well as online delivery methods. Students have also taken part in the school's Gateway programme, as well as the local Trades Academy.

Teachers have been generous with their time. They have used non-contact times, weekends and holidays to provide opportunities for students to catch-up on work. A particular feature of the school is the three days per term set aside for all senior students to receive targeted assistance with gaining credits. The timetable is collapsed for this work and staff from inside the school, and from its external partners, work with individual students.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS – SELF-REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

How effective is our school in actively monitoring the success of students at risk of underachievement? Do our students have access to a staff member who works as a mentor, provides direct support and is able to broker opportunities to gain NCEA credits?

To what extent do the parents of our students understand the pathways and goals of their child? What systems do we use to tell parents about their child's progress and involve them in processes to support student success?

Tracking and monitoring student progress

Close tracking and monitoring of individual students was central to schools identifying and responding to the needs of their students. Some schools made a significant shift in managing student data. In particular, some schools recognised how little use they made of their student management system in monitoring student attendance and achievement. These schools found that they did not have good systems to record internal assessment data. As data was often not recorded in a timely manner, staff could not use their student management systems to accurately identify the number of credits students had achieved.

When accurate and timely data was available to staff, they used it to track attendance and achievement for target students across their different subjects. Such information made it possible to see if students were achieving their academic goals and meant that staff could see, as soon as possible, if a student was struggling.

The importance of accurate data and effective tracking was so valued by one school that the school's leadership team provided teachers with additional time to carry out their monitoring of students. At another school, a second dean was appointed for Years 11-13 to track student attendance and achievement.

THE TRACKING AND MONITORING OF STUDENTS – SELF-REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

To what extent can our teachers easily identify how many NCEA credits have been achieved by a student across each of their subjects and overall?

To what extent do our teaching staff follow the school's systems to enter attendance and achievement data in a timely manner?

What processes do we have in place to identify and support students if they fall behind on NCEA assessments?

Reviewing and improving teaching and support initiatives

Most of the staff from the target schools had informally reflected on their efforts in 2012 and considered the implications for school practices in 2013. One school had documented the review of their work with the target cohort. As part of this process, school leaders had interviewed students about what could be done better in 2013.

Schools reviewed aspects, such as the timeliness of data entry and the distribution of assessment activities through the academic year. Individual schools identified the positive aspects of this work and started implementing changes in how they respond to individual students.

In discussions with ERO, school personnel identified the positive impacts of their work in 2012. These included:

- gains in individual student achievement and NCEA qualifications
- raising staff and student expectations of what could be achieved (even in a relatively short space of time)
- the increased retention of individual students into Year 13
- greater staff awareness of the issues facing at-risk students and priority learners at their school
- obvious positive changes in some students' attitudes towards NCEA and school
- more talk among students about gaining credits, including merit and excellence endorsements
- students having a better understanding of themselves as successful learners
- students being more conscious of the credits they had gained and the targets they needed to reach
- a weakening of the idea that failure was the student's fault
- greater appreciation by teachers of the specific challenges students faced in achieving NCEA qualifications.

All but two of the 13 schools showed evidence of continuing or improving on the strategies that were implemented in 2012. Some of these schools saw this as a continuation of their practices to improve NCEA achievement. The aspects schools identified for further development in 2013 included:

- the earlier identification of students needing support
- refining of school-data systems
- the closer monitoring and tracking of all students
- improving the way students were mentored
- an emphasis on developing relevant and useful programmes of learning
- setting stretch targets for 2013
- professional learning and development (PLD) for staff on effective teaching strategies and constructing individual student development plans.

ONE SCHOOL'S JOURNEY TOWARDS WHOLE-SCHOOL CHANGE

This school had achieved a high level of staff commitment to support the target cohort. It had some strategies already in place, before it was contacted by the Ministry, but its efforts overall were significantly influenced by a Ministry of Education Student Achievement Function Practitioner (SAFP). As the principal of the school stated:

The school created the goals (for this project) with her support. The SAFP facilitated very well... She helped us understand how to use the data.

The data for this project had been generated through the school's involvement in the *Starpath* project. The target cohort of 40 Year 12 students, who had between 20 and 30 credits at NCEA Level 2, was chosen by the school. Staff estimated that approximately 80 percent of these students would not have achieved NCEA Level 2 in 2012 without additional support.

Students in the target cohort were supported through mentoring by a 'familiar' adult. Some students were already involved in a mentoring programme where they chose the adult. Mentors were carefully selected, with most of the matching done by the principal and a deputy principal. Each mentor was responsible for between one and three students.

Individual plans were drawn up with the students and individual profiles were set up in the student management system, including information on credit accumulation. These profiles were accessible to all staff, and were regularly updated and monitored by the principal and other senior leaders.

The students met fortnightly with their mentor who helped them monitor their progress. The mentors were responsible for checking that the courses were appropriate, offered sufficient credits and had the right balance to support their student's career aspirations. Discussions were held with parents to build a partnership to support students. Mentors and the Year 12 Dean visited the homes of students who had attendance concerns.

Whole-staff expectations were developed and displayed in the staff room. All staff were required to respond to target students' requests and to record internal NCEA data promptly. A credit scoreboard (without names) was displayed for all staff showing the number of students who had achieved a targeted level of credits. Some staff responded to the school's urgency for the target group by providing support classes in the end of Term 3 break. All students in the target group attended these additional classes.

The additional support provided to the target cohort has most likely influenced improvements in the school's overall achievement in NCEA Level 2. The roll-based data for Year 12 students, for example, showed a 21 percent increase on 2011, with an 11 percent increase compared to the 2010 results.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR SCHOOL'S SELF REVIEW?

How well is our school focused on improving its responsiveness to students across academic, pastoral and careers domains?

To what extent has our school used the Career Benchmarks (Careers NZ) to review the effectiveness of its careers provision across the curriculum?

How well do our Māori and Pacific students achieve? What is needed to significantly improve the curriculum for individual Māori and Pacific students at our school now? What school-wide strategies might be needed to improve our responsiveness for groups such as Māori students and Pacific students?

How well prepared are our school leavers? What information does our school have about the destinations of its leavers? How well prepared were they for their pathways from school? What can our school do to better prepare future school leavers?

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the good practices identified above, ERO also identified some significant challenges that school personnel should address when attempting to improve the proportion of their students receiving NCEA qualifications. These challenges are discussed below.

Providing credible pathways for students

A risk of an increased focus on students achieving NCEA qualifications is that credit acquisition becomes a goal in itself without due consideration given to whether the credits gained are relevant to a student's future. In a few of the schools in this evaluation, students did acquire credits that were not well aligned to their intended career pathways. Some of these students had acquired credits via off-site courses that operated over a weekend or during the term break. These 'short-term' opportunities had little relevance to the career goals of these students and did little to facilitate opportunities for more advanced study.

All schools need to ensure that student pathways, and the development of their career management competencies, are central to efforts to improve their achievement.⁸ ERO

⁸ See Appendix 1 for a discussion of the Career Management competencies. See also the Ministry of Education's careers education guidelines for schools available from <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/content/download/2767/35051/file/Career-guidelines-web.pdf>

found that in most of the schools in this project, NCEA success was aligned to student pathways. For example, some schools provided students with opportunities to acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy credits within the context of more relevant or favoured subject areas. Other schools provided students with some opportunities to gain credits through off-site courses. This was done within the context of the student's career aspirations.

Developing a sustainable, whole-school approach

Most of the schools used a small number of staff to provide enhanced support for their target students. At each school, varying numbers of other staff supported these students as part of their role as subject teachers and departmental heads.

A challenge for many of the schools in this evaluation was to increase the number of staff working with students and the number of students who benefit from individualised support. Many senior leaders had identified that getting whole-staff buy-in would be a key challenge in 2013. For some schools this will involve normalising the increased individual attention given to some (if not all) students.

Developing a more whole-school approach, for most schools, will involve some coordinated professional development for teachers, particularly in the timely use of data for earlier tracking and monitoring of students. In some cases this professional development should include staff training on the effective use of student management systems. One school had already identified that improvements in its reporting and appraisal processes were making teachers more accountable for student outcomes.

Extending the range of students targeted

While the Ministry suggested that schools focus on students who were within 20 credits of achieving NCEA Level 2, schools also placed their focus on various other groups of students. Some schools were focused on students who were likely to miss achieving NCEA Level 2 by much more than 20 credits. Some schools were already focused on Year 11 students attempting NCEA Level 1, as they considered this qualification an important gateway to success at higher levels. Some smaller schools saw all senior students as their target group.

Some schools identified that they needed to respond much earlier to student needs and be more proactive in providing relevant learning opportunities. In some cases staff indicated to ERO that working with NCEA Level 2 candidates earlier in the year was important, as was extending a similar approach for students yet to pass NCEA Level 1. One school had concluded that their responsiveness should start for students at Years 9 and 10. An examination of New Zealand's NCEA Level 1 achievement data suggests

that the issues preventing some students from achieving NCEA Level 2 go much further than their education in Year 12. As the table below shows, there are more students who do not achieve NCEA Level 1 than there are students who achieve NCEA Level 1 but do not go on to achieve NCEA Level 2.

Table 1: The number of school leavers who do not achieve NCEA Level 1⁹

Year	Total school leavers	Achieved NCEA Level 2	Achieved NCEA Level 1 (but not Level 2)	Did not achieve NCEA Level 1
2011	63 362	45 464	7 651	10 247
2010	63 307	43 458	8 399	11 280
2009	59 901	39 774	8 073	12 054

Such evidence, in combination with other data,¹⁰ underlines how important it is for students to have high quality schooling throughout Years 1 to 10 if they are to succeed in NCEA qualifications. Secondary schools, for example, need to have systems for ‘catching up’ students in Years 9 and 10, as well as those students in Years 11 to 13.

Involving the Board of Trustees

It was evident, in this evaluation, that trustees were not well informed about school actions to lift NCEA achievement. Boards did not receive student achievement data about this project or self-review reports. Principals should ensure that board members are informed about such efforts and that they consider the implications of this information within their roles as trustees.

9 Data sourced from Education Counts website.

10 See especially ERO (2013) *Accelerating the Progress of Priority Learners in Primary Schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

Conclusion

The focus on a target cohort of Year 12 students at risk of not achieving NCEA Level 2 by the end of 2012 has encouraged the secondary school leaders and teachers in this pilot study to examine and improve their performance. This report identifies some of the good practices which schools have subsequently developed – in particular, those related to addressing individual students' needs, building positive relationships with students and their families and tracking and monitoring student progress. Schools should use this report and other recent ERO reports¹¹ to reflect on how well they are ensuring that all students are receiving high quality learning opportunities as set out in *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

ERO's investigation of school initiatives, combined with the achievement data from this project, indicates that overall, some students have gained success. Achievement data shows that in this pilot study 189 students (out of 311) achieved NCEA Level 2 in 2012. While it is not possible to know for sure what would have happened without the additional efforts of schools, there is enough evidence to suggest there has been a positive influence on student achievement.

Schools should, nevertheless, be wary of focusing on the acquisition of credits at the expense of student pathways. In this evaluation ERO found a few cases where students gained credits that did not have clear links to their pathways, including any future educational opportunities. The credits students gain should not depend on whatever credit accumulation opportunities can be identified. Instead, students and their families can expect, as part of *The New Zealand Curriculum*, that their identified pathways into further education, training and employment will be a starting point for school support structures to gain NCEA qualifications.

11 For example, ERO (2013) *Secondary schools: Pathways for future education, training and employment*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

Next steps

On the basis of this report, ERO recommends that all secondary schools:

- review the quality of tracking and monitoring of students working towards NCEA qualifications to ensure that the progress of all students is subject to regular scrutiny throughout the year
- ensure that an appropriate range of support processes are in place for students whose achievement is below that expected and/or is inconsistent with their intended pathway to future education, training and employment
- review the extent to which their academic programme, including the programmes and opportunities that exist with external providers, is responsive to the identified career pathways of their students
- review the extent to which the families of students at risk of underachievement are well informed about the progress of their children and included as partners in processes to support student success.

Appendix 1: The career management competencies

*Career Education and Guidance in New Zealand Schools*¹² sets out a model of career education and guidance that emphasises the need for students to develop career management competencies. This represents a move away from career guidance based on vocational counsellors managing student exits from school, and towards an approach in which students take more control of their lives. The career management competencies are set out in terms of the following categories:

- *Developing self awareness*

Competencies that enable young people to understand themselves and the influences on them.

- *Exploring opportunities*

Competencies that enable young people to investigate opportunities in learning and work, and relate them to themselves.

- *Deciding and acting*

Competencies that enable young people to make and adjust their plans, to manage change and transition, and to take appropriate action.

The career management competencies can be linked to the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. As the table below shows, schools can simultaneously develop student key competencies while developing their career management competencies.

Links between the career management competencies and the key competencies of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

Career management competencies	Link to the key competencies
Developing self awareness	Involves managing self and relating to others.
Exploring opportunities	Requires students to think critically, use language, symbols, and texts, and relate to others.
Deciding and acting	Involves students thinking constructively and preparing to participate and contribute throughout their lives.

12 Ministry of Education (2009)
Careers education and guidance.
<http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/curriculum-resources/career-education>.

Education Review Offices

NATIONAL OFFICE – TARI MATUA

Level 1,
101 Lambton Quay
PO Box 2799
Wellington 6140
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482
info@ero.govt.nz

TE UEPŪ Ā-MOTU

Māori Review Services

c/o National Office
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482
erotu@ero.govt.nz

NORTHERN REGION – TE TAI RAKI

Auckland

Level 5, URS Centre
13–15 College Hill
Ponsonby
PO Box 7219, Wellesley Street
Auckland 1141
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 04 499 2482
auckland@ero.govt.nz

Hamilton

Floor 4, ASB Building
214 Collingwood Street
Private Bag 3095 WMC
Hamilton 3240
Phone: 07 838 1898 Fax: 04 499 2482
hamilton@ero.govt.nz

CENTRAL REGION – TE TAI POKAPŪ

Napier

Level 1, Dundas House
43 Station Street
Box 4140
Phone: 06 835 8143 Fax: 04 499 2482
napier@ero.govt.nz

Whanganui

Ingestre Chambers
74 Ingestre Street
PO Box 4023
Whanganui 4541
Phone: 06 349 0158 Fax: 04 499 2482
whanganui@ero.govt.nz

Wellington

Revera House
48 Mulgrave Street
Wellington 6011
PO Box 27 002
Marion Square
Wellington 6141
Phone: 04 381 6800 Fax: 04 499 2482
wellington@ero.govt.nz

SOUTHERN REGION – TE TAI TONGA

Christchurch

Level 1, Brown Glassford Building
504 Wairekei Road
P O Box 25102
Christchurch 8144
Phone: 03 357 0067 Fax: 04 499 2482
christchurch@ero.govt.nz

Dunedin

Floor 9, John Wickliffe House
265 Princes Street
Dunedin 9016
PO Box 902
Dunedin 9054
Phone: 03 479 2619 Fax: 04 499 2482
dunedin@ero.govt.nz

