

**Working with the  
National Standards:  
Raising Student  
Achievement in  
Reading, Writing and  
Mathematics**

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## Executive summary

This report is part of a series of national evaluation reports ERO is publishing over three years about the implementation of the National Standards in English-medium schools with students in Years 1 to 8. The first report, *Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum*, was published in August 2010. An interim report, *Working with the National Standards: ERO's interim findings for Term 3, 2010* was published in November 2010.

The data for this report was gathered from 237 schools ERO reviewed during Terms 3 and 4, 2010. At this time many schools were reviewing and trialling the way they reported to parents and whānau about each student's progress and achievement against the National Standards. School leaders and teachers were also gathering and analysing information about students' progress and achievement in relation to the standards, as part of preparing to set targets in their 2011 charters.

ERO noted a positive shift in the percentage of schools working with the National Standards as part of their curriculum and assessment processes compared with schools reviewed in Terms 1 and 2, 2010. Ninety percent of schools in this current evaluation were either well prepared or had preparation under way to work with the National Standards. This is to be expected given that when ERO gathered data in 2010 for this report, schools had had more time to seek support to help them work with the standards.

Factors common to the 37 percent of schools that were well prepared to work with the National Standards were similar to those in the first report. These schools had strong professional leadership, carried out robust self review, reviewed and developed their curriculum on an ongoing basis, and teachers and school leaders made effective use of student achievement information. In addition, they had either reported or were preparing to report to parents about their child's progress and achievement against the National Standards. Most were generally well placed to set targets in their 2011 charters, with some having already set these for the next year.

Most of the 53 percent of schools where preparation was under way had a base of good practice to build on as they reviewed current practice against the expectations of the standards. For some, their local school curriculum was the foundation for aligning processes and practice with the standards. For others, recently appointed principals and/or senior management teams took a key role in preparation. Self-review and assessment processes were identified as two key areas for development in many of these schools. Barriers to preparation in some schools included issues with governance, leadership and teacher capability, as well as turnover of principal and staff.

In the 10 percent of schools not yet prepared to work with the National Standards, ERO identified factors that contributed to their lack of preparation. In most, assessment practices needed considerable development to enable leaders, teachers and trustees to use the standards in their respective roles. Changes or high turnover in school personnel, leadership capability, and opposition or resistance to the National Standards were also evident in some of these schools.

The extent to which students were involved in setting and assessing their learning goals related to the National Standards was still not high. Only 32 percent of schools did this well. In its August 2010 report ERO noted this as an area of concern, given it is central to working with the National Standards.

School leaders' and teachers' confidence in moderating achievement information in reading, writing and mathematics was developing. Where confidence was high it was often because of strong professional leadership in the school, and the guidance and support for teachers engaging in moderation activities. Having a reflective, open, and trusting culture in the school provided an environment where discussions about data and consistency of teachers' judgements could develop. Cluster work with other schools helped bring a broader perspective to moderation in some schools.

There were, however, some challenges for schools in this area. These largely related to:

- how well the National Standards were understood
- the extent to which leaders were able to work with achievement information at a school-wide level
- teachers having the confidence to work with a range of assessment tools and other sources of information to make judgements about students' progress and achievement against the reading, writing and mathematics standards.

Self review was crucial to schools' preparation to report to parents in 2010 as many schools were reviewing and trialling reporting formats and processes. This review was supported by professional learning and development sessions for teachers and included consultation with parents and whānau, and, in some schools, students. Written reporting was often an integral part of three-way conferences or parent interviews. Some schools were proactive in seeking parent feedback after mid-year reporting. Leaders and teachers refined their use of written language and included information for parents on helping their children at home. ERO identified issues that related to the quality or nature of the information used to report achievement and progress, and reports not yet informing parents about their child's progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards.

In the second half of 2010, schools were expected to begin preparing to set targets in their 2011 charters for improving student achievement. Schools that were well placed to do this, or had already set their targets, generally were those with good self review. They had well-established processes to gather and analyse school-wide achievement information as part of curriculum review and strategic planning. Aligning existing expectations and assessment practice with the standards helped them with these processes. Many schools that were not yet preparing to set targets had previously had issues with the quality and relevance of their targets or poor quality information on which to set targets.

Understanding of the standards by trustees showed a minimal increase over the second half of 2010. ERO's August 2010 report noted that many trustees were new to their roles because of recent board elections. At the time of this report, these new trustees were still in the process of 'growing into' and becoming familiar with their roles, and knowing about the standards. Apart from being new, the main barriers to

trustees' increased understanding were lack of time to come to terms with their role in relation to the standards, and funding for external support for trustees.

Areas where schools needed further support to work with the National Standards in 2011 included:

- time to look in depth at the relationship between the standards and their school curriculum and align them to existing practices and assessment tools
- help with moderation of judgements and associated analysis and use of achievement information
- more support for trustees to understand and work with the standards as part of their governance role and responsibilities.

## **Next steps**

ERO recommends that school leaders:

- continue to improve teachers' confidence in using information from a range of sources to make overall judgements about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- improve the scope and quality of information reported to boards of trustees about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards, to ensure targets are appropriate and contribute to decision-making, particularly for students needing additional support
- increase opportunities for students to understand their learning in relation to the National Standards, set goals to improve their progress and achievement, and identify their next steps for learning.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- provides more guidance to schools in relation to what reporting to students about their progress and achievement against the National Standards involves, particularly in the context of existing formative assessment/assessment for learning practice
- promotes opportunities for discussion about the National Standards and associated moderation through existing or newly developed school cluster arrangements.

## Introduction

This ERO report is part of a series of reports being published over three years about the implementation of the National Standards in English-medium schools, with students in Years 1 to 8. *Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum*, was published in August 2010. An interim report, *Working with the National Standards: ERO's interim findings for Term 3, 2010* was published in November 2010.

The National Standards came into effect in 2010 for English-medium schools with Year 1 to 8 students. They describe the achievement that will enable all students to achieve success across *The New Zealand Curriculum* and have been designed so a student who meets them is on track to succeed at National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) Level 2.

In the publication, *National Standards information for Schools*,<sup>1</sup> the Ministry of Education stated:

In this first year of implementation, schools are expected to:

- *help students understand the standards and their goals in relation to them*
- *assess students' progress and achievement in relation to the standards, using a range of assessment methods*
- *ensure that students understand their progress and achievement and what the next steps are in their learning*
- *provide at least two plain-language reports to parents, family and whānau about their child's progress in relation to the standards*
- *support parents, family, and whānau to understand the process and format of reporting and how they can work with schools to support their child's progress.*

The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) require schools to report to parents and students progress and achievement in relation to National Standards. From February 2010, schools have been required to report to parents in writing and in plain language, at least twice a year, about how their child is progressing and achieving in relation to the reading, writing, and mathematics standards. The focus of the mid-year report is expected to be on progress towards meeting the standards, with the end-of-year report to focus on the summary of individual student's progress and achievement in relation to the standards. ERO was interested in schools' preparation to meet these reporting requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/Key-information/Information-for-schools>.

Schools are expected to set targets in their 2011 charters that will enable them to report in their 2012 annual report on:<sup>2</sup>

- the numbers and proportions of students at, above, below or well below the standards, including by Māori, Pasifika and by gender (where this does not breach an individual's privacy)
- how students are progressing against the standards as well as how they are achieving.

ERO was therefore interested in what schools were doing to prepare to set targets in their 2011 charters.

In this second cycle of data gathering, ERO investigated:

- how schools were aligning their school assessment practices to use the National Standards and focus their teaching
- how schools were preparing to report to parents in plain language
- how they were preparing to use National Standards information to set targets in their 2011 charter
- the understanding and preparedness of school leaders, teachers and trustees to use the standards.

## Methodology

This evaluation involved 237 schools where ERO carried out an education review in Terms 3 and 4, 2010. Information about the types of schools, their roll size, locality (urban or rural) and decile rating groups are included in Appendix 2.

ERO gathered the data for this evaluation in the context of the major evaluation question for education reviews in 2010:<sup>3</sup>

*How effectively does this school's curriculum promote student learning - engagement, progress and achievement?*

The questions used in this evaluation are in Appendix 1.

All data was collected by ERO review officers in the normal course of their review activities. ERO's *Framework for School Reviews* sets out the process for education reviews.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>National Administration Guideline 2A (c)

<sup>3</sup> See: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/For-Schools-and-Kura-Kaupapa-Maori>

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/For-Schools-and-Kura-Kaupapa-Maori>

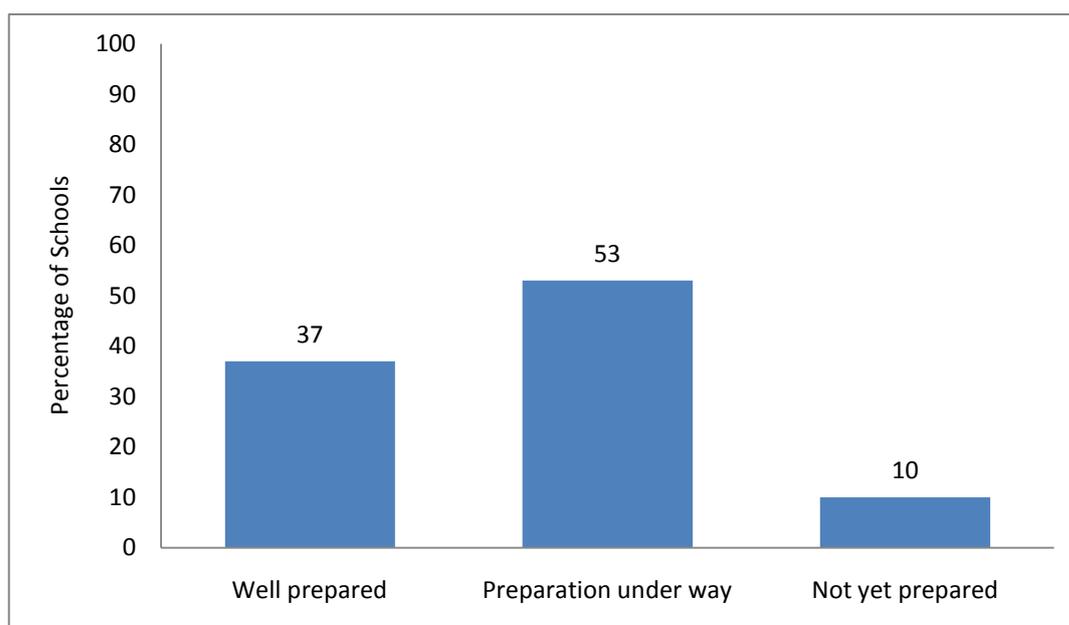
## Findings

### Preparation to work with the National Standards

ERO evaluated each school's preparedness<sup>5</sup> to work with the National Standards. As shown in Figure 1, 37 percent of the 237 schools were found to be well prepared, compared to 19 percent in Terms 1 and 2, 2010. Preparation was under way in 53 percent, compared to 61 percent previously, and 10 percent were not yet prepared to work with the standards, down from 20 percent.

The increase in the percentage of schools that were well prepared to work with the National Standards was not surprising given that the data was gathered in the second half of 2010 when schools had had more time to prepare.

*Figure 1: Schools' preparedness to work with the National Standards*



#### ***Schools that were well prepared to work with the National Standards***

The common themes throughout the schools that were well prepared to work with the National Standards were similar to those reported by ERO in August 2010. They included schools having:

- strong professional leadership
- robust self review
- ongoing review of their school curriculum
- effective analysis and use of student achievement information by teachers and school leaders.

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<sup>5</sup> Schools that are well prepared will be making good use of assessment information for learning; will be in the process of developing moderation processes and will be supporting teachers in making overall teacher judgements based on several sources of data.

ERO found that these schools had reported or were preparing to report to parents about their children's progress and achievement against the National Standards. They were also generally well placed to set targets in their 2011 charters that would enable them to meet reporting requirements in relation to the standards in their 2012 annual report.

The following examples show how four schools were well prepared to work with the National Standards.

*A thoughtful, well-understood self-review process assisted school leaders and teachers to make plans to improve teaching and learning. Information about achievement, school practices and the views of the school's community contributed to planning decisions.*

*Curriculum leaders collected and analysed reliable information in reading, writing and numeracy. They used standardised, formative and moderated information to identify trends and patterns of achievement. School leaders successfully used assessment information to:*

- *identify trends and patterns of achievement and set targets and plans for improvement*
- *evaluate the impact of improvements introduced to change teaching practices*
- *identify professional development needs of teachers*
- *contribute to appraisal of teacher performance*
- *influence resourcing decisions. (Full primary school)*

*At all levels of the school, steps were being taken to understand and work with the National Standards. The standards were viewed as a means to gather useful, valid data that contributed to good quality self review and the strategic direction of the school. The board and leadership team were well informed about students' progress and achievement and committed to improvement. (Contributing primary school)*

*School leaders quickly and successfully actioned their annual plan goals in relation to the working with the National Standards. Leaders considered it essential that staff develop a good understanding about making 'overall teacher judgements'. The year's focus was on moderation and increasing the emphasis on collective responsibility for student achievement and progress. School leaders had a clear understanding of their next steps to ensure they continued to embed the standards in day to day practice. (Contributing primary school)*

*Teachers used multiple sources for making judgements about student achievement levels. Senior leaders and teachers attended a workshop about 'overall teacher judgements' (OTJs). They found this workshop very useful and realistic. It gave them ideas on how to look in depth at OTJs, encouraged them to use existing assessment processes and tools and review what was working well and decide what in their processes needed tweaking. Moderation discussions in syndicates and at staff meetings helped teachers consider their judgements. (Contributing primary school)*

### ***Schools that were preparing to work with the National Standards***

Schools with preparation under way made up just over half of schools in this evaluation. ERO's August 2010 report noted that *"in the schools where preparation was under way, ERO found a range of approaches and practices that reflected where each school was at in designing and reviewing its curriculum and aligning its assessment practices with the standards."* This remains the case.

Most of these schools had a base of good practice to build on in their preparation to work with the National Standards. For some, new leaders and/or leadership teams provided impetus for preparation and in others development of their local school curriculum built a foundation for aligning school processes and practice with the standards.

Self review and assessment were two key areas for development in many of these schools. To improve self review schools needed to:

- adopt a more strategic approach to review and associated monitoring and reporting processes
- identify patterns and trends in achievement data and use this information to make evidence-based decisions about curriculum changes, resourcing needs and professional learning and development (PLD) for staff
- improve the quality of achievement information they collected and used, and the relevance of targets set based on any such information
- use achievement information to identify groups of students needing additional support and include these students in their charter targets
- evaluate the impact of programmes and interventions on students' progress and achievement.

In order to improve assessment practices, schools were mostly focused on building confidence in making overall teacher judgements, undertaking moderation and involving students in assessing their learning. Some had considerable work to do to improve their analysis and use of information, particularly for Māori and Pacific students. ERO noted that many of these schools needed to improve the scope and quality of reporting to the board of trustees and to parents.

Other areas of focus were curriculum review, and strategic and annual planning.

Factors affecting schools' preparation for working with the standards included:

- the capability of trustees, leaders and teachers to work with the National Standards as part of their respective roles and responsibilities
- principal and staff turnover, with 14 percent of these schools having recently appointed principals.

The following examples show how four schools were preparing to work with the National Standards.

*Improving the quality and use of school wide achievement information was necessary as this school moved to fully work with the National Standards. School leaders needed to extend the range of information collated school-wide and interpret it more fully to inform decision making. (Intermediate school)*

*The school has compared their expectations for student achievement to those in the National Standards. They changed expectations for reading in the junior school to meet the National Standards. Teachers developed a moderation file for writing at the different levels. The school used a range of assessment tools in reading and mathematics. The principal acknowledged that the next step was to continue to develop teachers' confidence in making overall teacher judgements using their professional knowledge about students. (Full primary school)*

*Teachers had begun to make good use of the National Standards as part of teaching and learning in relation to The New Zealand Curriculum. They acknowledged that they were in the early stages of development and had work to do in moderation, the development of overall teacher judgements and reporting in plain language student achievement information that was useful to parents. (Contributing primary school)*

*At the syndicate level, leaders were analysing reading and numeracy data. From this data they identified low achievers and the interventions that they were receiving. They were starting to use assessment information to identify areas that needed more focused teaching within syndicates. This analysis was yet to happen at a school-wide level to ensure that targets were relevant. Targets appeared to be more linked to professional development than achievement information. Some practices for reporting to parents were stronger in the junior syndicate. (Full primary school)*

### **Schools that were not yet prepared to work with the National Standards**

In the 10 percent of schools (23) that were not yet prepared to work with the National Standards, ERO identified a range of contributing factors that included one or more of the following:

- changes or high turnover in school personnel (principals, senior management, teachers and/or trustees)
- opposition or resistance to the National Standards
- leadership capability.

Some of these schools had considerable work to do to review their curriculum and many still had to develop assessment processes to improve the collection, analysis and use of information about students' progress and achievement by teachers and school leaders. This hindered their preparedness to report to parents, set targets to improve achievement of identified groups, and undertake robust self review.

Two of the schools were special schools and they were seeking clarification about how they were expected to work with the National Standards.

## **Looking in depth at how schools are working with the National Standards**

This section presents ERO's findings in relation to how the 237 schools:

- involved students in their learning
- moderated achievement information and challenges associated with this
- reported to parents
- were preparing to set targets as part of 2011 charters.

### ***Involving students in their learning***

ERO's August 2010 report found that only 30 percent of schools had well-established practices for involving students in setting and understanding their learning goals. Data gathered in Terms 3 and 4, 2010 indicates little change. Thirty-two percent of schools involved students in assessing their learning and associated goal setting related to the National Standards. Practices were variable in 25 percent of schools, compared to 20 percent previously. Thirty-nine percent of schools were in the early stages of developing practice in this area and 4 percent had not yet begun to develop practice to share information with students about their progress and achievement against the standards.

Where schools involved students in understanding the focus of their learning, practices were similar to those reported previously by ERO. Teachers facilitated practices such as student-led conferences, student self assessment and peer assessment and sharing assessment information, learning intentions, exemplars and success criteria with students. They regularly reviewed students' learning goals with them and used portfolios to provide evidence of progress towards and achievement of specific learning goals. Although some schools had begun to link established practices, such as goal setting, to the National Standards, this was a next step for many schools.

In the schools that were either at an early stage or were developing practice in this area, the focus for development was on setting more specific goals that were linked directly to each student's learning in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers were working on increasing students' ownership and understanding of their goals. They were beginning to share assessment information with students and to talk about what it meant in terms of their next learning steps. Three-way conferences, involving teachers, students and parents, gave opportunities for students to talk about their progress and achievement.

The following examples show how four schools were at different stages in increasing students' understanding of the focus of their learning.

*Students were integrally involved in identifying their next steps for learning through their use of indicators or success criteria. They were skilled in the use of an inquiry for learning model and applied it to guide and focus their learning. Students were given very detailed information about their strengths*

*and next steps for learning three times a year. This information was used to facilitate a three-way conference with their parents. Students iteratively set goals for their learning as a natural authentic part of their learning. They talked about this in some detail and knew when they had achieved their goals. Teachers affirmed students' learning through very detailed feedback and feed forward (that matched with what students had usually identified for themselves). (Contributing primary school)*

*Students were active participants in setting and monitoring their own goals in reading, writing and numeracy in Year 4 to 6 classes. Students worked with teachers and their parents to identify possible goals. They developed an action plan for achieving their goals and kept records of their progress in a folder kept for that purpose. Teachers regularly made reference to progress in achieving the goals when they conferenced with students about their work. (Contributing primary school)*

*Students were involved in a goal-setting process as part of the three-way conferences including the student, their parents and the teacher. The goal-setting process was in the early stage of development and some of the student's goals were not specific. However, the principal was monitoring these and had planned further guidance for teachers before the next goals were set. Part of the reporting process to parents included each student's portfolio being sent home before the three-way conferences. This portfolio included examples of self assessment alongside annotations of feedback from the teacher. Test papers were also included. Goals were reviewed at the next three-way conference later in the year. (Contributing primary school)*

*Involving students in their learning was at an early stage of development. Students set personal and other goals, sometimes related to key competencies. Senior students were encouraged to reflect on the progress they had made towards achieving their goals. The quality of the goals, learning intentions and next steps was variable and quite dependent on individual teacher's knowledge of the curriculum. (Full primary school)*

ERO identified only a few schools (4 percent) where students were not yet given opportunities to be involved in assessing their learning, goal setting and identifying next learning steps. This suggests that most schools were well placed to extend practices to involve students in understanding their progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards.

### ***Moderation practices and challenges***

As with other aspects of preparation to work with the National Standards, schools were at different stages of understanding moderation and their confidence with it.

Where schools were confident with moderation, often it was because of the reflective, open and trusting culture that enabled leaders and teachers to engage in professional discussions about student achievement information. In some schools, guidelines, matrices, rubrics, indicators or exemplars guided moderation activities and supported consistent practice. PLD related to moderation was undertaken as a whole staff and, in some schools, it was also a focus in syndicates or teams. Whether led from within

the school or with the support of an external facilitator, PLD was crucial in the development of shared understandings and a whole-school approach to moderation.

In some smaller schools, confidence with moderation was developing through informal discussions and collaborative planning and assessment. Working with other small schools also helped build teacher confidence.

Where schools were developing moderation processes, this was assisted by regular staff meetings and PLD sessions. Confidence was built through teachers having ownership of the data analysis process and the opportunities they had to look in depth at data in team meetings. In some schools, leaders were planning for moderation and documenting associated expectations and procedures. Assessment timetables or schedules were developed and/or reviewed, and teachers were helped to increase their confidence and competence in administering assessment tools.

The following examples show how three schools were developing confidence with moderation.

*Leaders had implemented three key processes to support teachers with moderation:*

- *In-school PLD with an external provider focused on making ‘overall teacher judgements’ and engaging in moderation so that teachers were clear about achievement levels, especially in literacy*
- *Ongoing professional discussion and support from the school assessment team supported teachers to understand the National Standards and know how to make valid and reliable teacher judgements using a range of tools (exemplars, standardised and norm referenced assessments)*
- *Ongoing discussion with other schools in the cluster explored what the National Standards are, how to achieve consistency of judgements, and how to achieve alignment with the intermediate school that students from this school transition into. (Contributing primary school)*

*Because there was considerable variability and inconsistency in teachers’ testing procedures and assessment decisions, senior leaders had already worked with staff to clarify expectations for taking reading running records, carrying out numeracy assessments and moderating written language using the Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) matrix and national exemplars.*

*The principal also developed contacts within a cluster to get a wider consistency around ‘overall teacher judgements’ – not only specific to their own school, but to promote moderation practices and understanding in the cluster. Moderation and discussions about student achievement and progress were a regular part of discussions at syndicate meetings. Formative assessment knowledge complemented summative ‘point in time’ assessments. (Contributing primary school)*

*The school involved teachers in a manageable amount of professional development about the National Standards. Senior leaders were well versed in the intent and practical issues surrounding the standards. They worked well*

*with teachers to help build knowledge and capability in this area. The training sessions mainly involve exchanges of information at staff meetings.*

*A wider range of assessment tools were used. Some were formally administered nationally standardised assessments. School leaders were working with teachers to find ways to informally record teacher observations of student responses during teaching, as a formative assessment tool and as a means of increasing the evidence available to support 'overall teacher judgements'. These judgements were moderated during syndicate discussions. More work in moderating teachers' judgement was needed.*

*Numeracy assessments were well established, but no moderation processes were yet in place. The school was complementing numeracy project assessment tools with a nationally standardised assessment tool. (Contributing primary school)*

Just under a fifth of the 237 schools (18 percent) were working with other schools to increase leaders' and teachers' confidence with moderation and/or to moderate their judgements about student progress and achievement against the National Standards.

In some cases this happened through established cluster arrangements, and in others it involved creating clusters or relationships with nearby schools. Cluster activities included PLD sessions focused on moderation and workshops where leaders and teachers discussed moderation practices and examples of assessment and associated teacher judgements. A few contributing schools used cluster meetings with local intermediate schools to align their understanding of student progress and achievement.

The following examples show how four schools were involved in cluster activities as part of developing confidence with moderation.

*Teachers were involved in a local cluster for literacy development. They moderated writing achievement judgements in the cluster and across the school three times a year. This process enabled them to have certainty about the most suitable next steps for students' learning. Moderation processes were being transferred to the analysis of running records of reading and numeracy assessments. (Full primary school)*

*Teachers participated in National Standards workshops, facilitated by an external provider and through internal PLD. They were well supported through external facilitation to moderate and make overall teacher judgements about student achievement in literacy and numeracy. Writing achievement was assessed and moderated through the development of school writing exemplars based on the literacy learning progressions. Teachers were involved in cluster-based teacher workshops and engaged in professional discussion on what evidence should be used to formulate overall teacher judgements. (Contributing primary school)*

*Teachers were involved in considerable professional development to enhance their competence and confidence in using assessment tools. The principal and*

*teachers were involved in local cluster groups, where ideas for high quality practice were discussed and debated. Staff had opportunities to discuss challenges and ideas with external facilitators, as well as ongoing internally-facilitated discussions and moderation sessions. Long-term involvement in targeted literacy and numeracy professional development, with a focus on use of assessment to enhance teaching and learning, also provided a sound basis for staff to make informed overall teacher judgements. This school had an embedded culture of professional discussion, modelled by the principal, and facilitated by the organisational structure, that provided a forum for developing shared understandings. (Contributing primary school)*

*Moderation was undertaken between the three teachers in the school to improve consistency of judgements. The initial lack of confidence in the reliability and validity of the data was being resolved by seeking moderation involving literacy advisers and other cluster schools. Improving the accuracy of achievement data through moderation was a focus for 2010 and would continue to be an area for development in 2011. (Full primary school)*

In schools where leaders and teachers were not confident with moderation, ERO identified common areas for development. They included the need to:

- improve the analysis and use of data by teachers and school leaders
- introduce a wider range of assessment tools to strengthen the evidential base for teacher judgements
- increase teachers' confidence and ability to make valid and reliable judgements about student progress and achievement
- increase school leaders' and teachers' knowledge about the National Standards.

Challenges for some schools in undertaking moderation included:

- finding ways to work with other schools of similar size
- overcoming isolation for some small schools
- staff turnover
- accessing PLD in the use of assessment tools
- the appropriateness of moderation for special schools.

### **Reporting to parents**

Self review was crucial to schools' reporting to parents in 2010. Many schools had reviewed and trialled reporting formats and processes. This involved staff meetings and consultation with the parents and whānau, and in some cases, students as well. School leaders and teachers also reviewed the language they used in reports and integrated previous reporting formats with requirements to report on the standards. In some schools, PLD sessions helped with this review and development. Trialling often led schools to revisit assessment practices and question the quality of the data they used for reporting.

Schools that had reported to parents mid 2010 had done so in terms of the progress students were making towards meeting the standards. Some reporting included next steps for students' learning and information about how parents could help their child

at home. Written reports also provided a basis for discussion at parent-teacher interviews or at three-way parent-student and teacher conferences which in some cases were led by the student.

Seeking parents' feedback as part of ongoing self review was important for schools that had trialled reporting formats. They used surveys, focus groups, hui with whānau groups and informal discussions for this. Some schools held parent evenings to share expectations and help parents to understand new reporting formats and the information reported about the National Standards. A few schools also asked students about the usefulness of new reporting formats. Schools used feedback from parents to modify their reporting and the content and language used.

Preparing to report to parents about their child's progress in relation to the National Standards has challenged schools to look more closely at the language they use, what they report, and when, and the information they base their judgements on. Some schools were aware of the need to improve the quality or nature of the achievement information used as a basis for reporting to parents.

The following examples show how five schools were reviewing and trialling their reporting formats and processes.

*The school has revised its reporting to parents system. Student portfolios provided a collection of student testing results and formative development. New reporting formats were being reviewed even though they had only been used once. School leaders reported that although small changes had been made, the school was already collecting appropriate standardised data and held 30 minute three-way parent, teacher, student conferences to share the achievement level. This was now based on National Standard information. (Contributing primary school)*

*School leaders and teachers had begun to trial a format for reporting to parents and had made some changes to reporting practices by introducing a mid-year written report. They used this as their first attempt to report with clear links to the National Standards. As part of this process they sought examples from other schools before developing their own. The recent trial of mid-year reporting in relation to the National Standards provided teachers with good opportunities to discuss and develop shared understandings with their colleagues and school leaders about the concept of overall teacher judgement. A feature of the recent reporting format was highlighting what parents could do at home to support the students' next learning steps. (Contributing primary school)*

*The school has continued to develop its systems for reporting to parents to provide plain-language information. There was a great deal of consultation undertaken to ensure that the school had a clear understanding of community preferences and requirements for reporting on achievement. The senior managers made good progress in developing their existing reports with feedback from staff and parents regarding the template and content. Reports described student achievement and progress in the key areas of reading, writing and*

*mathematics assessed against National Standard expectations. They also included next steps for learning in each area. (Contributing primary school)*

*The school reported to parents mid year in relation to the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The school consulted with parents about the new reporting format and intend to incorporate a mechanism to include progress against the standards for the end of year report. School practices were developing but were not fully in place to ensure robust and reliable teacher judgements. School leaders identified the need to do more work in writing to ensure that they were not over critical of achievement in the higher exemplar levels to the detriment of students. They were reluctant to use standardised tools and were not sure how these could be used for moderation. Leaders and teachers were still exploring more standardised tools to use in making OTJs. (Contributing primary school)*

*The principal and teachers were unsure how they would report on National Standards. The school only provided one written report at the end of the year. The principal and teachers identified students that they had previously identified as achieving at expectations who would now be below the National Standards. They were unsure how to share this information with parents and were nervous about parents' reactions if they perceived that their child was not progressing at the level that they had previously thought that they were at. (Full primary school)*

### **Preparation to set targets in 2011 charters**

Preparation to set targets involved schools in a variety of activities that closely aligned to their work with the National Standards.

In schools that had already set targets for 2011, or were well placed to do so, leaders had a crucial role in this work and in establishing a collaborative culture that supported the development of targets focused on improving student progress and achievement. Wider curriculum review and strategic planning processes were closely aligned to target setting. Systems to identify students who needed additional support were well established. School-wide reporting showed patterns and trends of achievement for individuals and groups over time.

Schools that were preparing to set targets had aligned their assessment tools to the standards. Leaders and teachers were engaged in targeted PLD activities to increase their confidence in making judgements about students' progress and achievement and moderating their judgements. School-wide achievement information was collated and analysed. This included drawing on information reported to parents about their child's progress and achievement in relation to the standards. The use of assessment tools and associated schedules for administering them were reviewed. Leaders and teachers often used cluster meetings to discuss moderation.

Many schools that were not yet preparing to set targets had issues with the quality and relevance of target setting in the past and/or poor quality information on which to set targets. Other issues related to:

- limited analysis of achievement information to identify where targets were needed

- minimal reporting of achievement information to the board of trustees
- reporting to the board on only some cohorts of students
- reporting to the board on only some aspects of reading, writing and mathematics
- lack of alignment between the National Standards and the assessment tools currently being used or available for use.

The following examples show how four schools were preparing to set targets in their 2011 charters.

*School leaders had good systems in place to help them set targets by 2011. They had a well established assessment timetable and were experienced in monitoring and reporting on student achievement information, and using this information to set annual targets. School leaders had linked school assessment outcomes to the National Standards and had begun to discuss overall teacher judgements. School leaders had already introduced a process for reporting to parents and students against the standards. (Contributing primary school)*

*School leaders were well prepared to use information about student progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards to set targets in the 2011 charter. They had gathered and analysed achievement information over the past few years to show trends and patterns of achievement. The school kept up with changes over time and had made good use of the 'Literacy Learning Progressions', national assessment tools, asTTle criteria for writing, national exemplars and NEMP data. Leaders said that the National Standards were simply a natural next step for them. (Full primary school)*

*School leaders were already reporting achievement against the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Teachers had been involved in ongoing PLD in using the standards as they revised and updated their curriculum documents. The school was reviewing and developing its charter and was already using an evidence-based approach to target setting which is likely to continue. (Full primary school)*

*Target setting was an area for further development this school. For 2010, the board had set three achievement targets – for reading, numeracy and for information and communication technologies (ICT). The ICT target was about the school-wide PLD focus as this is an expectation of being part of a cluster of schools in their third year of an ICT focus. However, this target and the reading and numeracy targets were not specific. Senior managers collated school-wide achievement information in reading and numeracy and reported this to the board, but these reports were not well analysed to identify any trends and patterns nor did they include specific identified actions for improvement. (Contributing primary school)*

## Understanding the National Standards

In Terms 3 and 4, 2010, ERO continued to gather data about how well school leaders, teachers and trustees understood the National Standards. The level of understanding of the standards for all groups has increased since August 2010. School trustees had increased their understanding the least.

*Figure 2: Understanding of the National Standards - school leaders, teachers and trustees*

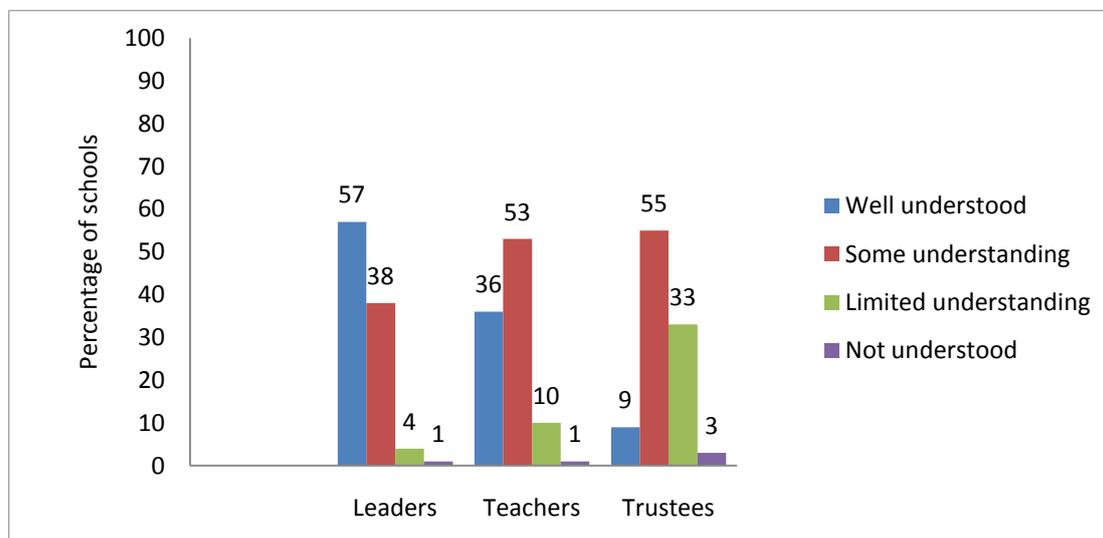


Figure 2 shows that school leaders had the greatest understanding, with 57 percent of leaders understanding the standards well, compared to 38 percent in ERO's August, 2010 report. Appropriate support from external facilitators had helped school leaders to understand the standards. Support included PLD, involvement in the local principals' cluster group and good communication among school leaders, staff, parents and community.

The main barrier to improving school leaders' understanding was a shortage of time to discuss and reflect on the standards. For some leaders, poor quality PLD or facilitators' lack of knowledge about the standards were also barriers to increasing understanding.

The National Standards were well understood by 36 percent of teachers, compared to 15 percent previously. PLD support from external facilitators was the main factor helping teachers to understand the standards. Many teachers were developing a good understanding by embedding the expectations of the standards into their practice and programmes. As with leaders, lack of time was the major barrier to improving their understanding. Again, some PLD was not seen as useful or of good quality, and in some cases facilitators were not knowledgeable about the standards.

The National Standards were well understood by 9 percent of trustees, compared to four percent previously. As with school leaders and teachers, PLD and support from external facilitators was the main factor in trustees' increased understanding of standards. Other factors included school leaders giving them useful information on the standards, and trustees' own positive, enthusiastic attitudes towards the standards. Many trustees were newly appointed at the time of their school's ERO review, and

were still in the process of learning about their own roles, and the expectations associated with the standards. Barriers to understanding included a shortage of time and funding for PLD.

The following example is of the approach one school took to increasing understanding of the National Standards and working with them.

*There was a well-planned and consultative approach to understanding, implementing and using the National Standards at all levels including trustees, school leaders, teachers, parents and students. Parents were involved in workshops to inform them about the standards and provide an opportunity for a discussion about their use.*

*The principal's reports to the board identified student achievement information against the National Standards for each cohort. Strategic and annual targets were written so that they aligned to the standards. Mid- and end-of-year reports were designed that identified individual student's achievement - at, below, well below or well above year level expectations, and this continued to be a work in progress. The majority of board members were newly elected and so there was recognition by school leaders of the need for targeted training about the National Standards. They planned opportunities to discuss progress made so far in this area with trustees. (Contributing primary school)*

## **Support in working with the National Standards**

A range of support has continued to help schools working with the National Standards, including professional development and printed and online resources.

Almost all of the 237 schools (85 percent) had used some form of external support to help them to understand and work with the National Standards. This was slightly higher than ERO's findings in its August 2010 report (75 percent).

The most frequently used forms of support were professional development workshops (either off-site or at the school and led by an external facilitator), and online and print resources. Most schools had used more than one form of support and supplemented attendance at workshops by using print and online resources, participating in web seminars and/or cluster meetings and seeking the expertise of external facilitators.

Where schools had used external support, the impact continued to be mostly positive. Teachers and leaders in many schools, and trustees in some, were more aware of the standards, understood them more clearly and were more confident in working with them.

External support was helping schools to:

- align their existing assessment practices with the National Standards
- review and refine their processes for reporting to parents
- develop a planned approach to using the standards as part of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

More than half the schools (58 percent) had also used some internal support to help them work with the National Standards. This was most often in the form of

school-wide professional development led by the principal or other staff. Many schools had also used print resources and web seminars.

In many schools, the principal and/or other leaders had attended workshops on the National Standards, sometimes as part of a cluster. School leaders talked to staff about what they had learnt from these workshops, and discussed the standards as a team at staff meetings or on teacher-only days.

In a few schools, concerns were raised about the quality and availability of external support provided. These included:

- the variable quality or relevance of professional development
- facilitators lacking the knowledge to answer questions raised
- confusion because information presented was not clear, consistent or specific
- support not being timely or comprehensive enough for the amount and complexity of work involved.

ERO also identified areas where further support was needed for school leaders, teachers and trustees. These included:

- more time to look in depth and work with the standards, and help to align them with the school's existing assessment practices and assessment tools
- ongoing support, both whole school and targeted specifically for school leaders, teachers and trustees
- help with moderating achievement information, both within and between schools
- support for teachers to make overall judgements and for leaders to analyse student achievement information
- more information for trustees about available resources related to the National Standards and relevant to their governance role.

Schools highlighted the need for ongoing support focused on helping teachers to understand and work with the standards. Some schools noted that trustees needed more support than leaders or teachers. These findings were similar to those reported by ERO in August 2010.

A few schools wanted more detailed guidance in particular areas, such as having more exemplars for writing or mathematics aligned to the standards, and having information for parents on the standards available in a range of languages.

## **Use of the Ministry of Education's self-review tools**

The Ministry of Education has developed a set of self-review tools to help schools work with the National Standards.<sup>6</sup> A separate tool was developed for leaders, teachers and trustees to help them identify their own professional strengths and learning needs in relation to the National Standards. The tools are based on key questions and can be used collaboratively, both for regular self review and working with external facilitators.

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<sup>6</sup> See: See: <http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/National-Standards/Self-review-tools>

ERO wanted to know how aware school leaders, teachers and trustees were of the three tools and how they had used them. Awareness and use varied in and among schools.

Figure 3: Use of Ministry of Education Self-review Tools

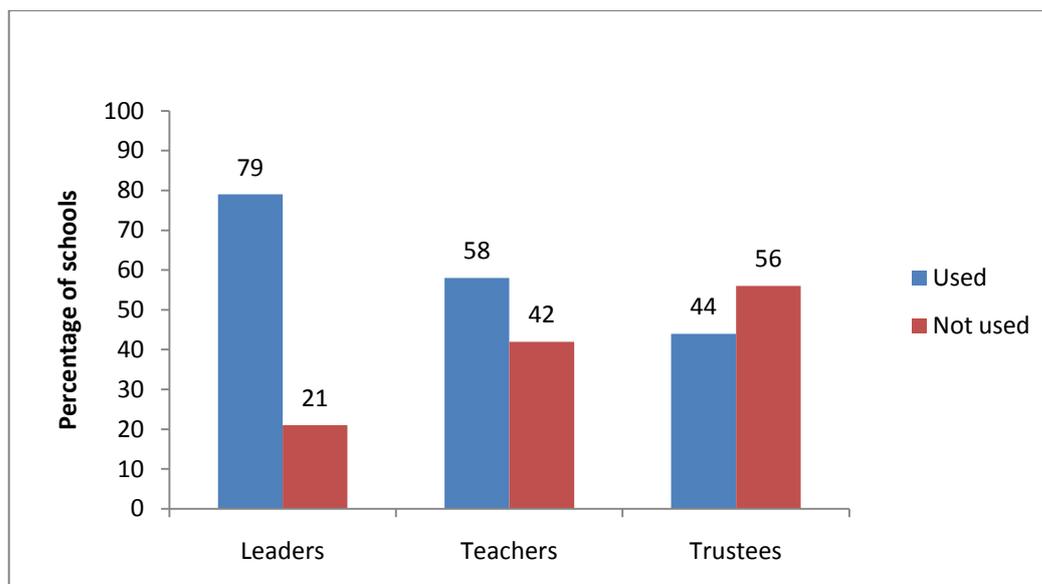


Figure 3 shows that school leaders (79 percent) were considerably more likely than teachers (58 percent) or trustees (44 percent) to be aware of the tool and using it. This closely mirrors ERO's findings in August 2010.

Many school leaders had introduced the self-review tool to their staff, often through professional development or workshops, and were using it as a basis for discussion at management and/or syndicate and/or staff meetings. Many also used it to inform and/or review the school's current practices and to identify strengths and areas for development. In some schools, leaders were aware of the tool, but had yet to use it.

Teachers in over half the schools were aware of the tool, and were using it mainly to discuss the implications of the standards for their practice. Discussions took place in staff meetings, professional development sessions and workshops, and at teacher-only days. Again, teachers in some schools were aware of the tool, but were not yet using it.

Trustees were less aware of the self-review tool than leaders or teachers, and their use was more informal. They were usually introduced to it through workshops or seminars related to the standards, or at board meetings. In a few schools, the tool had been given to the former board, but the new board had not yet looked at the questions in it.

When data was gathered for ERO's August 2010 report on schools working with the National Standards, many school personnel were just finding out about the availability of the self-review tools, and use was more limited than awareness. The findings in this report indicate that this is still the case, but to a lesser extent, and that most leaders and teachers who are aware of the tools have started using them, or at least considered how they will do so.

## Conclusion

Schools are still at varying stages of working with the National Standards. It is clear that schools that are well prepared to do so have high levels of professional leadership and robust self review. This includes effective use of high quality information about student progress and achievement.

This evaluation highlights what is helping school leaders and teachers to develop confidence in making overall teacher judgements and associated moderation. Schools are using existing cluster activities or setting up clusters with neighbouring or 'like' schools as opportunities to learn about moderation and/or engage in moderation discussions. The impact of such activity is worthy of further investigation. Schools need help with improving the analysis and use of achievement information to make valid and reliable judgements about student progress and achievement. Isolation, staff turnover and access to relevant PLD are some of the barriers to building confidence with moderation.

To successfully report to parents and whānau about their child's progress and achievement against the National Standards, schools need to work in partnership with their community. The findings of this evaluation highlight the value of schools trialling and refining report formats and seeking feedback from parents and students about the usefulness and relevance of what is reported.

Schools that were well advanced in preparing to set specific targets based on good quality achievement information were often doing so because of their involvement in PLD and a commitment by teachers and school leaders to ongoing improvement. This is an area where some schools need help to ensure targets are responsive to their achievement information, so they can particularly target those students below or well below the relevant standards.

Schools continue to use external support to help school leaders and teachers work with the standards in a variety of ways. It is important that information about the National Standards is accessible to all groups – school leaders, teachers, trustees, parents and students and that the messages conveyed are consistent.

Those providing external support need to be knowledgeable about the standards and how schools might work with them in the context of each school's curriculum. Increasing trustees' understanding of the standards and what they mean in terms of governance responsibilities is crucial as boards set targets in their 2011 charters, plan to meet these targets and report on the outcomes in their 2012 annual reports.

ERO is continuing to evaluate how schools use the National Standards as an integral part of their ongoing self review of curriculum development, assessment practice and strategic planning. In Terms 1, 2 and 3, 2011 ERO will continue to focus on how schools report to parents and the impact of target setting and associated action planning on improving student achievement, particularly for those who need support to achieve appropriate standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

## Next steps

ERO recommends that school leaders:

- continue to improve teachers' confidence in the use of information from a range of sources to make overall judgements about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- improve the scope and quality of information reported to boards of trustees about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards, to ensure targets are appropriate and contribute to decision-making, particularly for students needing additional support
- increase opportunities for students to understand their learning in relation to the National Standards, set goals to improve their progress and achievement, and identify their next steps for learning.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- provides more guidance to schools in relation to what reporting to students about their progress and achievement against the National Standards involves, particularly in the context of existing formative assessment/assessment for learning practice
- promotes opportunities for discussion about the National Standards and associated moderation through existing, or newly developed, school cluster arrangements.

## Appendix 1: Questions used to guide this evaluation

ERO sought specific information through the following questions:

- *How do school leaders use student achievement information to inform their self review, set achievement targets, and make resourcing decisions to support students' learning, progress and achievement?*
- *How are school leaders preparing to use information about student progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards to set targets in their school's 2011 charter?*
- *How are school leaders supporting teachers to develop confidence and understanding in making evidence-based decisions to ensure consistency and reliability of their judgements about student progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics?*
- *How are school practices enabling teachers to use assessment data in reading, writing and mathematics to focus their teaching, particularly for identified groups of students?*
- *How are school practices enabling teachers to make judgements about student achievement and rates of progress in reading, writing and mathematics using data from a variety of sources?*
- *How are school practices enabling teachers to develop confidence to make consistent and reliable judgements about student progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics?*
- *How are school practices enabling teachers to report or to prepare to report their judgements about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards to parents in plain-language written reports?*
- *How are students involved in understanding their progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards? What involvement do they have in assessing their learning, setting their goals and deciding their next steps for learning?*
- *To what extent are the National Standards understood by teachers, school leaders and trustees?*
- *What support have teachers, schools leaders and trustees accessed to help them to work with the National Standards? What impact has this support had? What support do teachers, school leaders and trustees need to support them to work with the National Standards?*
- *Have school leaders, teachers and trustees used the Ministry of Education's self-review tools? If so, how?*
- *How prepared is this school to work with the National Standards as part of its teaching and learning in The New Zealand Curriculum?*
- *How well is this school placed to sustain ongoing improvement and promote progress and achievement for all students?*

## Appendix 2: Statistics for sample of schools

This evaluation involved 237 schools in which ERO carried out an education review in Terms 3 and 4, 2010. The types of schools, roll size, school locality (urban or rural) and decile ranges of the schools are shown in Tables 1 to 4 below.

*Table 1: School types*

School type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage <sup>7</sup>
Full Primary (Years 1-8)	110	46	48
Contributing Primary (Years 1-6)	94	40	34
Intermediate (Years 7-8)	12	5	6
Special School	3	1	2
Secondary (Years 7-15)	12	5	4
Composite (Years 1-15)	6	3	6
Total	237	100	100

Table 1 shows that full primaries, intermediates, composites and special schools were slightly under-represented, in comparison to national figures. Contributing primaries and Years 7-15 secondary schools were slightly over-represented, in comparison to national figures. The differences were not statistically significant.<sup>8</sup>

*Table 2: Roll size*

Roll size <sup>9</sup>	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Very small	25	11	9
Small	55	23	23
Medium	80	34	38
Large	57	24	21
Very large	20	8	9
Total	237	100	100

Table 2 shows that large and very small schools in the sample were slightly over-represented, and medium and very large schools were slightly under-represented, in comparison to national figures. The differences were not statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup> The national percentage of each school type is based on the total population of schools as at February 2011. For this study it includes full and contributing primaries, intermediates, special schools, secondary, composite and restricted composite schools with students in Years 1-8. This applies to roll size, locality and decile in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

<sup>8</sup> The differences between observed and expected values were tested using a Chi square test.

<sup>9</sup> Roll sizes for full and contributing primary schools, special schools and intermediates are: very small (between 1-30); small (between 31-100); medium (101-300), large (301-500); and very large (500+). Roll sizes for secondary, composite and restricted schools are: very small (1-100), small (101-400); medium (400-800); large (801-1500); very large 1501+).

Table 3: School locality

Locality <sup>10</sup>	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Main urban area	122	51	50
Secondary urban area	18	8	7
Minor urban area	24	10	13
Rural	73	31	30
Total	237	100	100

Table 3 shows that the numbers of main, secondary urban and rural schools in the sample are very slightly over-represented, and minor urban schools slightly under-represented, in comparison to national figures. The differences were not statistically significant.

Table 4: School decile ranges

Decile <sup>11</sup>	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Low decile (1-3)	57	24	30
Middle decile (4-7)	96	41	39
High decile (8-10)	84	35	31
Total	237	100	100

Table 4 shows that low decile schools in the sample were slightly under-represented, and middle and high decile schools were slightly over-represented, in comparison to national figures. The differences were not statistically significant.

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<sup>10</sup>Based on location categories used by the Ministry of Education and Statistics New Zealand as follows: Main Urban population > 30,000; Secondary Urban 10,000 to 30,000; Minor Urban 1,000 to 9,999; Rural < 1,000.

<sup>11</sup> A school's decile indicates the extent to which a school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.