

Supporting school improvement
through effective principal appraisal

May 2014



PRINCIPAL



Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa

The Child – the Heart of the Matter



Published 2014

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Education Evaluation Reports

ISBN 978-0-478-43800-0 (MS Word)

ISBN 978-0-478-43801-7 (PDF)

ISBN 978-0-478-43802-4 (HTML)

ISBN 978-0-478-43803-1 (pbk.)



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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.

As part of its evaluation of board employment responsibilities, ERO evaluated principal appraisal and its contribution to the principal's development, improved teaching, and improved student outcomes.

Principal appraisal is a very important role for school trustees. When effective, the appraisal process is a pivotal part of a system of improvement. The challenge is for boards to implement an appraisal process that moves beyond principal development to the wider strategic goals of improved teaching and learning.

Students' success 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.

Rob McIntosh
Chief Review Officer (Acting)
Education Review Office

May 2014

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Overview

This evaluation is one of a series¹ related to board employment responsibilities, including appraisal in New Zealand schools. It is intended to provide information to help boards of trustees and education agencies to strengthen principal appraisal so that the appraisal process better supports improving teaching and learning.

The Education Review Office (ERO) evaluated the appraisal² of principals in 173 primary and 27 secondary schools in Term 1, 2013, before the triennial board elections. The evaluation focused on how effectively principal appraisal contributed to the principal's own development, improved teaching and improved outcomes for students. ERO also surveyed a sample of board chairs about the most recent appraisal of their principal.

Principal appraisal became a requirement for boards in 1997 and has both accountability and development purposes. The principal is accountable for implementing the board's strategic plan, and for meeting the professional standards for principals. The developmental aspect includes improving teaching and learning throughout the school as well as the principal's own development.

In most schools sampled, ERO found that the principal's appraisal contributed to one or more of the three improvement purposes of appraisal – the principal's own development, staff development and improving student achievement. In schools that demonstrated best practice all three of these aspects were evident. When strategic goals, the annual plan, performance agreement and appraisal were linked coherently, the focus of appraisal was on significant actions to achieve strategic improvement goals. Student achievement data was used consistently to assess progress towards the school's strategic goals, and also to review the principal's effectiveness as a leader in facilitating progress towards these goals.

Principals had been appraised in almost all the schools included in this evaluation. However, the effectiveness of the appraisal needed to improve so that it had a greater impact on teaching and learning. Boards were clear about their role in strategic planning but need guidance and support in using appraisal as a lever to strengthen progress towards strategic goals.

1 ERO (2013) *Board employment responsibilities: linking charter targets to appraisal in primary schools*, Wellington: Education Review Office. <http://www.ero.govt.nz/National-Reports/Board-Employment-Responsibilities-Linking-Charter-Targets-to-Appraisal-in-Primary-Schools-February-2013>

ERO (2013) *Student safety in schools: Recruiting and managing staff*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

ERO (2013) *Supporting school improvement through teacher appraisal*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

2 Appraisal is the term used in this report instead of Performance Review which is the term used in the collective agreements with principals.

Appraisal practices associated with improvement

The following features were evident in schools where the principal's appraisal was improvement focused:

- Appraisal goals were linked to the school's strategic goals and annual plan.
- Goals were linked to outcomes for students, including priority learners, and evidence about student learning was used as an indicator of progress and the achievement of a goal.
- Development goals were focused on increasing the capability of school leaders and teachers.
- Accountability goals were related to leading and managing the school and improving the quality of teaching.
- Goals were clear, specific and challenging.
- Appraisal was against the professional standards and Registered Teacher Criteria, including the principal's teaching where appropriate.
- Professional development and support was identified for the principal as the professional leader.
- Feedback was sought from a range of stakeholders including staff, parents, students and trustees.
- Useful feedback was provided by the appraiser along with next steps for further development
- The board received a report about progress towards, and the achievement of, goals.

In these improvement-focused schools high expectations for students were also evident. The board and leaders demonstrated a commitment to raising achievement with a planned approach to improving teaching and achievement. Data were well analysed and used to identify needs, determine priorities, inform resourcing and monitor progress. Targeted professional learning and development (PLD) was linked to strategic goals, including leading and managing change for the principal and school leaders, as well as PLD on teaching and using data for all staff. Robust appraisal and self-review systems supported improvements.

In schools where principal appraisal was not effective goals were often general or not related to improving teaching and learning. The appraisal process was not robust and recommendations for next steps were not likely to lead to improvement.

The board's appraisal of the principal

Most board chairs surveyed felt confident about appraising the principal and believed the process for appraising their principal was effective. About 40 percent had received training to carry out the principal's appraisal, and about two-thirds of board chairs had obtained helpful advice, usually from the New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) or the Ministry of Education.

Almost all boards had policies, procedures and guidelines for appraising the principal. Boards usually reported that the principal's appraisal goals were linked to the strategic plan, developing teaching, outcomes for students and the principal's own development. Most boards said they included measurable objectives and used student achievement data and stakeholder feedback to assess the principal's performance.

However, most boards did not review how well the guidelines were being followed, or whether the principal's appraisal was having a positive impact on the school. Some boards and principals were not clear about what needed to be reported to the board for discussion so that boards could meet their responsibilities.

Over half the schools reviewed used an external appraiser for part of or the whole appraisal. Appraisal was effective when the appraiser used a robust process and provided challenging directions for improvement. Use of an external appraiser did not necessarily result in a robust appraisal. Some external appraisals had vague goals, lacked evidence to assess performance, or did not provide useful next steps.

Next Steps

Boards need targeted guidance and support to understand how to meet their responsibility for appraising the principal in a way that strengthens progress towards the strategic goals. The following recommendations recognise that NZSTA now has responsibility for board professional development.

ERO recommends that the New Zealand School Trustees Association:

1. Use opportunities provided through newsletters and training to regularly remind boards of their responsibility for principals' appraisal and the guidelines available to support them.
2. Review the advice they provide about principals' appraisal, to ensure it includes guidance on using appraisal to strengthen progress towards the school's strategic goals. Guidelines should include:
 - how to link appraisal goals to the school's strategic goals and targets
 - examples of specific, challenging goals linked to raising student achievement and to use of student achievement information as an indicator to measure progress or achievement
 - how boards can work effectively with an external appraiser
 - what should be reported to the board to ensure they meet their responsibility for appraisal and monitor progress towards the strategic goals.
3. Ensure the latest resources can be easily identified, and accessed through the NZSTA website, with links from the Ministry of Education's and the New Zealand Teachers Council websites.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

1. Ensures Ministry documentation and PLD (such as information for new trustees and leadership PLD) includes information about the importance of effective principals' appraisal.

ERO recommends that boards of trustees:

1. Strengthen links between principal appraisal goals and the school's strategic priorities
2. Carefully develop goals, especially around improving teaching and learning, that are challenging and specific
3. Use student achievement information as an indicator and evidence of goal achievement or progress
4. Identify appropriate PLD for the principal, to support progress towards the school's goals and the principal's appraisal goals
5. Develop processes for ongoing reporting of progress towards both the principal's goals and the school's strategic goals
6. Clarify what should be reported to the board about the principal's appraisal and how discussion of the appraisal will contribute to next steps for the school and the principal.

7. Ensure the final appraisal report identifies clearly which principal and school goals have been achieved, which have not, and the next steps
8. Use ERO's evaluation questions and indicators and board chair survey to review their principal appraisal practices and outcomes (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Introduction

Requirements for principal appraisal

Performance management systems were first introduced in schools in 1987. The annual appraisal of principals became mandatory in 1997. The board of trustees is the legal employer of the principal and is responsible for establishing the principal's performance agreement each year and reviewing the principal's performance against the performance indicators in that agreement.³ The principal is a member of the board, its chief executive and its key advisor.

The New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) published guidelines for boards of trustees on principal appraisal in 2005, 2008 and 2009. Its guidelines⁴ for boards about managing principal appraisal state that:

Performance appraisal or performance review of a Principal is a tool by which the board can measure whether the objectives set for the school are being met. ... Performance review is about taking an organisation (the school) and the individual (the Principal) forward through setting objectives and establishing indicators by which those objectives will be measured.

The board must also appraise the principal against the professional standards set by the Secretary for Education. The professional standards form part of the Principals' Collective Agreements, and provide a baseline for assessing satisfactory performance within each area of practice. They are also included in the principal's performance agreement, which reflects the school/board goals, the principal's job description and more specific objectives, and identifies appropriate indicators. The performance agreement must also include the New Zealand Teachers Council criteria for registration as a teacher (RTC).

Changes to the Primary Principal's Collective Agreement in March 2013⁵ have the potential to increase the robustness of principal appraisal. The collective outlines the need for boards to be provided with evidence to show the professional criteria has been met by the principal.

Although boards of trustees are responsible for appraising the principal, they may use an external appraiser for some or all of the process. NZSTA provides guidance for boards on how to work effectively with an external person. These are described in more detail in Section 3.

3 NZSTA. (2013) *Trusteeship: a guide for school trustees*, Wellington: NZSTA

4 NZSTA. (2009) *Guidelines for Primary Boards of Trustees: Primary Principals' Performance Review*. Wellington: NZSTA

5 Section 4.4 allocates responsibility to the board to affirm the principal meets the professional criteria of individual professional growth, leadership and contribution and is entitled to a career allowance. The principal presents evidence to the board to show they have met the criteria, which may include compliance with ERO improvement recommendations for the school, outcomes of professional learning and/or sabbaticals, goals reflected in the school charter, including strategies for improvements to student learning that reflect the principles of the New Zealand curriculum documents.

Boards using appraisal for improvement

NZSTA recently stated that *managing the principal – performance agreement and performance review is one of the most important jobs for the board.*⁶ However, Wylie⁷ reported that while most trustees and principals saw providing strategic direction as the key element of the board's role, far fewer trustees and principals viewed scrutinising school performance and overseeing the principal as key elements.

Boards develop the vision and strategic direction for their schools, with broad goals for three-to-five years. The strategic goals should focus on outcomes for students and identify areas for improvement that are most likely to lead to improved outcomes. The strategic goals should be the basis of the annual plan, the performance agreement, and the principal's appraisal.

Principals are responsible for implementing the strategic plan and, accordingly, the achievement of every strategic goal. The principal develops an annual plan to specify the actions needed to achieve the goals. This annual plan, which is approved by the board, should be the basis for the annual performance agreement between the board and principal, and should include agreed indicators of achievement of the goals or progress towards them. The board is responsible for reviewing the principal's performance against the agreed performance indicators each year.

Boards can use principal appraisal to help progress towards meeting their goals and vision. If the strategic plan and appraisal both focus on improving teaching and learning, the goals can be used to guide actions to promote improvement.

Principals can influence outcomes either directly or indirectly through teachers. Bendikson et al⁸ distinguish between direct and indirect instructional leadership. Direct instructional leadership focuses on the quality of teaching, while indirect leadership creates the conditions for good teaching and teacher learning. Examples of direct leadership include planning, evaluating teaching and the curriculum, promoting and leading teacher learning and development. Indirect leadership uses school systems, structures and resources to reinforce a focus on improvement.

6 Davies, C. (2013) *Principal Performance Agreement The Board's Role*, presentation at NZSTA Conference 2013, Wellington: NZSTA (slide 3)

7 Wylie, C. (2013) *Secondary schools in 2012*, Wellington: NZCER.

8 Bendikson, L., Robinson, V., and Hattie J (2012) *Principal instructional leadership and secondary school performance, SET 1*, Wellington: NZCER.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)'s 2011 evaluation of New Zealand's evaluation and assessment framework for improving school outcomes⁹ considered that implementation of appraisal varies across schools. The report noted that enhancing performance appraisal of school leaders is important to provide them with external feedback, identify areas for improvement and offer targeted support to improve practice. The OECD noted the 'potential benefits of appraisal as a means to communicate a vision of effective leadership, such as pedagogical leadership, and as a tool to influence and improve school leaders' practices and behaviours'.

The OECD recommended several areas for improvement including:

- strengthening the connection between principal appraisal and school development
- providing training and support for boards and principals to carry out effective appraisal
- improving links between school development, appraisal and strategies for teacher professional development.

The OECD also noted the 'potential benefits of appraisal as a means to communicate a vision of effective leadership, such as pedagogical leadership, and as a tool to influence and improve school leaders' practices and behaviours.'

Effective appraisal of the principal is fundamental to ensuring accountability and ongoing development throughout the school.

*'Teacher quality is the most important school-level determinant of student performance, and school leadership focused on improving the motivation, capacities and working environment of teachers is most likely to improve student learning.'*¹⁰

Five New Zealand studies have found that most principals and trustees self reported that principal appraisal was useful or effective¹¹. This ERO evaluation investigated the appraisal processes and links to effectiveness.

Sources of information

Information for ERO's evaluation was drawn from three main sources:

- an online survey of a sample of board chairs about appraising the principal (154 chairs, 52 percent response rate) (self-reported data)
- an evaluation of appointment processes and practices in 27 selected secondary schools in Term 1, 2013 (independent external reviews)
- an evaluation of appointment processes and practices in 173 primary schools having a regular review in Term 1, 2013 (independent external reviews).

9 Nusche, D., et al (2012) *OECD Reviews of Evaluation and Assessment in Education: New Zealand 2011*, OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264116917-en>

10 OECD, (2009) *Improving School Leadership – the Toolkit*. OECD Publishing

11 See references Appendix 4.

Structure of this report

This report, *Supporting school improvement through effective principal appraisal*, summarises the evaluation findings in three sections:

- overall judgements of principal appraisal
- appraisal to strengthen leadership to improve teaching and learning
- processes used to appraise the principal.

Each section begins with relevant background information from guidelines and research to set the context for the findings. The report concludes with four appendices.

Findings

1 OVERALL JUDGEMENTS OF PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL

ERO evaluated the extent to which the most recent appraisal of the principal could contribute to the following three key aspects:

1. The principal's own development
2. Staff and school development
3. Improving student achievement.

ERO investigated appraisal processes, systems and documents to determine whether each of the three aspects above were evident to a great extent, to some extent, or to a limited extent. Reviewers used indicators, developed from research, as a basis for their judgements (see Appendix 1).

The indicators focused on:

- the content of appraisal goals, such as supporting the strategic direction, leadership to improve teaching, improving outcomes for students
- the nature of appraisal goals, such as challenging, specific, measurable
- the appraisal process, such as indicators, identifying support and PLD for the principal, sources of evidence, feedback from stakeholders.

Schools where appraisal was more effective were found to have more of these aspects. They are described in more detail in the following sections.

Overall contribution of principal appraisal to improvement

Findings from the onsite reviews

- The three aspects listed above were evident to some extent in a majority of principal appraisals in the schools sampled.
- However, these three aspects were evident to a great extent in only about a quarter of the schools.
- Appraisal was more likely to be focused on the principal's and staff development than on improving student achievement.

Findings from board chair surveys

- The majority of boards believed the principal's appraisal was effective in assuring them of accountability and improving teaching and outcomes for students.

Boards were generally clear about the need for principals to be appraised and had completed the appraisal in the previous year. However, the effectiveness of the appraisal in contributing to development was variable.

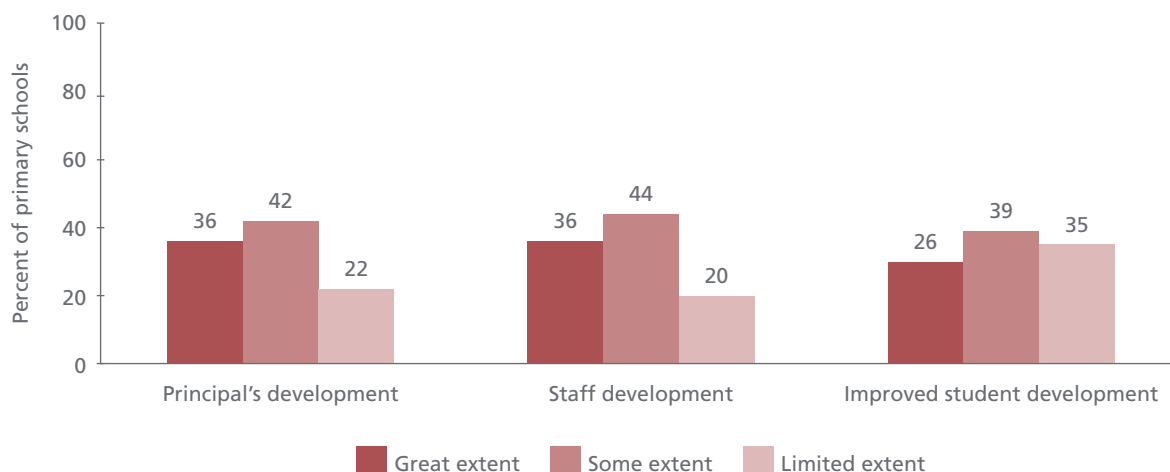
Eighty-six percent of primary schools (149 schools) reviewed had completed an annual principal appraisal process. Another seven schools had new principals who had been at the school for only a short time, and four schools had not completed appraisal because of ill health of the principal or appraiser. Eight percent (13) of primary schools had not completed an appraisal of the principal in the most recent year. Three of the 27 secondary schools had not completed the principal's appraisal, one because of illness of the appraiser.

The extent to which principal appraisal contributed to principal development, school development and improving student achievement varied considerably across the sample schools.

In primary schools, all three aspects were evident to a great extent in 17 percent of principals' appraisals compared to 11 percent of principals' appraisals in secondary schools. The principal's appraisal contributed to a limited extent to all three elements in 13 percent of primary schools and 11 percent of secondary schools.

The figure below shows the extent to which the three key aspects were evident in primary school principals' appraisal.

Figure 1: The extent to which the three key aspects were evident in principal appraisal in primary schools



The primary schools with the greatest focus on the three aspects had a planned approach to improving teaching through PLD and ongoing support for the school leader. Appraisal goals were related to improving student outcomes, improving teaching and improving strategic goals.

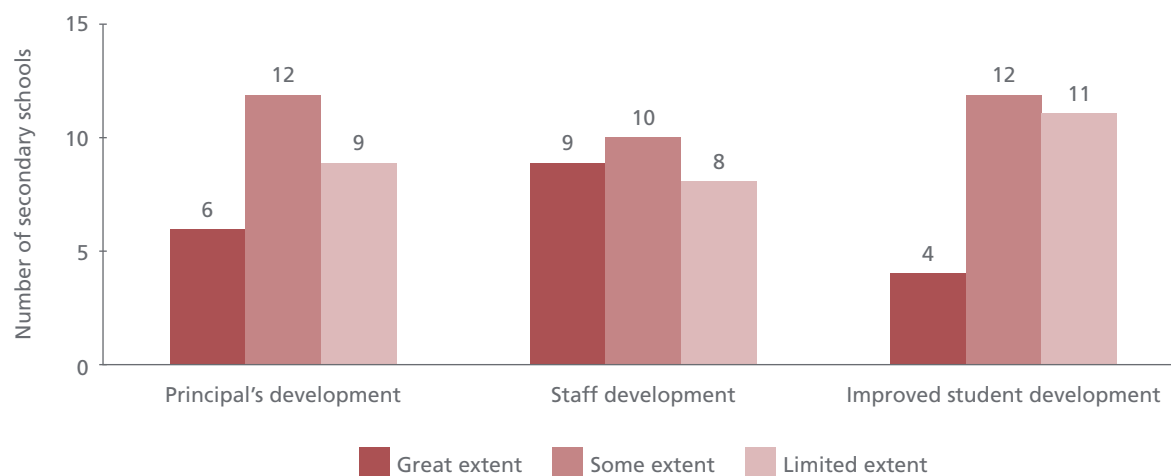
The following example illustrates this:

The principal's appraisal is focused on school improvement and implementing the annual plan. The student achievement targets are included in the annual plan and the principal's appraisal. The principal's development goals also align to the school's strategic direction. Goals include actions for the leader to improve teaching. Good work is being done to analyse student achievement data, which is then used to identify and monitor appropriate targets and support for students. Graphs show good student progress during the year. These are all aspects that the principal monitors closely to determine progress towards meeting the appraisal goal to successfully implement the annual plan. (medium size, rural, full primary school)

A strong relationship was evident between the quality of principal appraisal and the timing for the next ERO review in primary schools.¹² Principal appraisal was likely to contribute to a limited extent to the principal's own development, staff development and improved student achievement in a majority of schools that ERO planned to review again in one-to-two years.

Principal appraisal in primary schools was more likely to focus to a great extent on improving student achievement than in secondary schools. In secondary schools with the most effective appraisal, appraisal goals were linked to strategic goals and useful PLD was identified. These schools also had a focus on raising student achievement, particularly for priority learners. Good analysis and use of data, and coherence across the strategic plan, annual plan, PLD, appraisal, and staff development were also evident in these schools.

Figure 2: The extent to which the three key aspects were evident in principal appraisal in secondary schools



¹² Comparable information was not available for secondary schools as their appraisal was not investigated as part of a regular review.

The following describes the principal's appraisal in one of the three secondary schools where the appraisal contributed to all three elements to a great extent (principal's development, staff development, student achievement).

School goals, development plans and the principal's performance agreement goals are well aligned. The principal's development goals and appraisal support the school's strategic direction. A realistic number of challenging but achievable goals are combined with a suitable balance of goals linked to the principal's development, school and staff development, and outcomes for students. Goals include improving outcomes for students especially Māori, Pacific, refugee adults, students at risk of under-achieving, and students with special needs.

The appraiser and principal identify the goals/directions for improvement, and the support and PLD needed. Indicators to measure progress towards goals include specific student learning and assessment data. The principal's focus for a sabbatical is teaching and learning, and teaching as inquiry. Feedback is obtained from staff, students and parents. Teaching is appraised appropriately with observation of teaching. (Very large, main urban secondary school)

Board chairs are usually confident that their principal's appraisal effectively assures them of accountability. Table 14 in Appendix 2 shows most boards surveyed believe the principal's appraisal was effective or very effective in assuring them about key accountability aspects including:

- leading and managing the school
- that the principal is achieving agreed goals in the performance agreement
- the principal is meeting the professional standards for principals and Registered Teacher Criteria
- the principal is meeting the professional standards for teachers (if appropriate).

Generally board chairs were more confident than they should have been about how well their principal's appraisal focused on improving student achievement. Responses from board chairs surveyed indicate that 84 percent believed their principal's appraisal impacted on improving student achievement and 91 percent believed it contributed to improving teaching (Appendix 2, Table 14).

However, ERO found far fewer appraisals impacted on student achievement and teaching to such an extent. This finding highlights the need for boards to increase their understanding of how to develop and monitor goals that focus on raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching.

2 PRINCIPAL APPRAISAL CONTRIBUTING TO IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING

This section identifies three factors that influence how the principal's appraisal contributes to improving teaching and learning. These are:

- the usefulness of appraisal goals
- connections between appraisal goals and the strategic plan
- school culture.

Both the content and nature of the principal's appraisal goals are important for the appraisal's effectiveness. Goals that relate to developing staff and those that are challenging are likely to impact more on teaching and learning. The degree of goal achievement contributes to the appraisal of the principal's performance.

Since 1997, the guidelines for boards have stated that principal appraisal should link to the school's strategic plan, and both should focus on improving teaching and learning. Charters should include the school's strategic goals and expectations, and the annual plan should show the links with planning and promoting teacher learning, and using resources strategically to bring about outcomes for students.

The NZSTA *Guidelines for Primary Principals' Performance Review*¹³ state that objectives should be related to the school's goals and improved school performance, and be clear, measurable, and challenging but realistic. They state the principal's performance agreement should link to the strategic goals and annual plan, and to staff and student performance.

Robinson et al¹⁴ identified five key ways that principals influence student outcomes:

- establishing goals and expectations
- planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
- promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
- resourcing strategically
- ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Pont et al¹⁵ noted that school leaders play a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing teachers' motivation and capacity. To increase their influence, school leaders need to play a more active role in instructional leadership by:

- monitoring and evaluating teacher performance
- conducting and arranging mentoring and coaching
- planning teacher professional development
- orchestrating teamwork and collaborative learning.

13 NZSTA (2009) *Guidelines for Primary Boards of Trustees: Primary Principals' Performance Review*. Wellington: NZSTA.

14 Robinson V, Hohepa M, and Lloyd, C, 2009 *School leadership and student outcomes: identifying what works and why*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

15 Pont B., D Nusche and H Moorman (2008), *Improving school leadership, V1: Policy and Practice*, OECD, Paris.

Hattie¹⁶ reported that “School leaders who focus on students’ achievement and instructional strategies are the most effective ... It is leaders who place more attention on teaching and focused achievement domains ... who have the higher effects.”

ERO’s key findings: Principal appraisal to improve teaching and learning

Findings from onsite reviews

- In schools where ERO found principal appraisal focused on staff development and improved achievement to a great extent, appraisal goals were linked to the strategic or annual plans, improving outcomes for students, or improving teaching.
- Other school factors that contributed to improving teaching and learning were: a commitment to raising achievement and a planned approach that included good use of analysed data, strengthening teacher appraisal and other school systems, and targeted PLD.

Findings from board chair surveys

- Almost all board chairs surveyed were confident that their principal’s performance goals related to the strategic plan and were relevant to developing teaching, and improving outcomes for students, especially priority learners.

ERO’s findings about appraisal goals

Many principals’ appraisals were not focused to a great extent on improving teaching and learning. ERO found principal appraisal contributed to teacher development in about one third of schools and to improving achievement in fewer schools. (see Figures 1 and 2)

Selecting appropriate goals was critical to the effectiveness of the principal’s appraisal in supporting improved teaching and learning. Appraisal was more effective, and more likely to improve the quality of teaching and learning when: goals focused on teaching and learning; development goals were clear, specific and challenging; appraisal discussions focused on the impact of teaching on learning; and evidence of student learning was used to assess goal achievement.

Where appraisal of principals focused specifically on developing staff and improving student achievement to a **great extent**, goals were:

- linked to the annual plan or strategic plan
- focused on, or linked to, improving student achievement or outcomes for students
- related to leadership, developing staff, improving teaching, developing middle leaders, or managing change, for example, developing academic mentoring.

16 Hattie J (2009), *Visible learning – A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*, London: Routledge, p83.

Below are examples of improvement-focused goals.

The principal's goals are linked closely to the school's strategic plan and targets. Goals are linked to staff improvements in teaching and learning. One of the principal's performance agreement goals focuses specifically on the implementation of a new priority learner programme. (Small, rural, full primary school)

The focus on building leadership in the school is an outcome focused on in the principal's appraisal. The key focus has been on building teacher capacity and changing teacher practice from old comfortable ways of working to more student centred practice. (Very large, urban, contributing school)

The secondary school's target for raising student achievement became the principal's goal. The specific goal was to double the number of NCEA excellence awards and halve the number of standards not achieved. The principal's goals could be modified by teachers for a particular group of students, or particular achievement standards. The indicators to match this goal were also specific but were flexible to allow for varying classes. (Very large, main urban, secondary school)

The performance agreement contained a goal for the principal to mentor the senior leadership team to moderate the National Standards overall teacher judgement for five students per class. This goal was developed to ensure teachers had a more consistent understanding of National Standards expectations. (Medium size, minor urban, full primary school)

The challenge of developing appropriate appraisal goals

In schools where the principal's appraisal was more likely to have limited effectiveness in improving teaching and learning, the main weaknesses ERO identified were:

- goals and indicators were not linked directly to outcomes for students
- goals were not linked to the strategic plan or developing staff
- goals were vague, general and not challenging.

In these schools, boards and leaders had difficulty developing goals that met all the criteria of being **specific, measurable, challenging, and likely to lead to improvement**. Sometimes goals that were specific and measurable were not challenging or likely to promote improved teaching and learning. In some cases, goals were not related to school priorities, or there was little connection between goals and actions and evidence of outcomes.

Some goals referred to tasks or processes. Such goals can be useful if they are likely to lead to improvement. However, this was not always the case as found in one school where the principal had a goal to allocate the deputy principal's responsibilities to other staff members while they were on study leave. While this goal is specific, it is 'business as usual' and unlikely to result in improved teaching and learning.

Some goals were tasks or actions but lacked information about how they would improve outcomes for students. Examples included goals to:

- survey all parties to develop the school charter
- include National Standards in school profiles
- implement an induction programme to meet a shared vision
- lead six staff meetings.

The above tasks or actions would lead to improvement if they were linked to planning to address school priorities, but no such link was made in the principal's performance agreement.

An example of a specific but non-challenging goal was a specific target for numeracy that was set at a level lower than the previous year. Other goals included things that did not need to be addressed as they were not current issues. These goals are unlikely to lead to improvement.

Although the appraisal procedures and templates in some schools referred to SMART goals, in practice the goals were often general, not measurable, not expressed as expected outcomes, or unlikely to lead to significant development for the principal, staff, or the school.

Examples of vague goals that were not clear or measurable included:

- improve community links
- develop an inclusive school culture
- promote greater teacher ownership of school developments
- ensure staff are equipped to meet the vision and aims of the charter
- meet the needs of all students
- continue to attend relevant forums or conferences.

ERO's findings match those of Sinnema and Robinson¹⁷ who studied performance goals principals set when participating in a professional development programme for experienced principals. They noted that the principal's evaluation goals set a work and development agenda for the year, signal which purposes are most important, inform resourcing decisions, help coordinate activities, and motivate people to complete them.

17 Sinnema CEL, and Robinson VMJ, (2012) Goal setting in principal evaluation: goal quality and predictors of achievement, *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 11: 2012.

Sinnema and Robinson found that although most appraisal goals were about teaching and learning, they were vaguely expressed, did not provide definite criteria for judging progress, and where they could be judged, were only partially achieved. Fewer than a quarter of the goals were specific and identified a particular group of students or a learning area or quantified the level of achievement or improvement.

Connections between principal appraisal and effective strategic planning for improved teaching and learning

Schools where connections were evident between key review and improvement systems were more likely to have appraised the principal in a way that contributed to improvement. Conversely, where little coherence was evident across improvement systems, principal appraisal focused to a limited extent on personal development, staff development and improving student achievement.¹⁸

The following description shows how coherently review and development systems were linked to principal's appraisal and outcomes for students in one large, main urban, contributing school.

The board uses appraisal as an effective lever for ensuring that the principal and staff are focused on achieving charter goals, objectives and targets. The board's strategic approach makes a clear line of sight from the charter to programmes provided for students. Each of the programmes are effectively planned, have targets set, are regularly monitored, and progress is reported to the board. All planning documents such as budgets, curriculum plans, PLD programmes, and appraisal goals are linked in ways that show how they all contribute to achieving the school's annual goals and targets. The board sets high expectations for the principal's performance and leading of learning. School goals based around improved pedagogy and accelerating the progress of priority learners are at the centre of her performance agreement and appraisal process. School goals are further outlined in module goals for each year level, supported by a closely aligned PLD programme with module and syndicate specific PLD. These are also closely monitored through the teacher appraisal process.

This school and other improvement-focused schools in the sample recognised that to achieve improvement, it is necessary to identify key steps and plan how to carry them out. Guskey¹⁹ discusses the importance of systematically considering organisational factors when planning for improvement, such as changing teacher practice across the school. Leaders can support and promote the development by giving status to the improvement plans, allocating time and resources to the PLD,

¹⁸ The three relationships were tested using Chi Square tests and were highly significant ($p < 0.001$ for each). The number of secondary schools was too small for robust analysis.

¹⁹ Guskey T.R. 2000 *Evaluating professional development*. California: Corwin Press Inc.

and assigning responsibility for quality and completion of key aspects to a senior leader. Other aspects identified include: reviewing policies and procedures for alignment, time for teacher collaboration, and templates and tools to clarify and remind staff of expectations.

ERO compared the quality of principal appraisal with the quality of teacher appraisal²⁰ and found a weak relationship between the two in the schools reviewed. Half the schools with high quality teacher appraisal also had high quality principal appraisal. Most schools with low quality principal appraisal also had low quality teacher appraisal. This is consistent with the findings in ERO's report on linking charter targets to appraisal in primary schools.²¹ Both principal and teacher appraisal were linked to targets or achievement goals in only 21 percent of schools in the earlier ERO report.

The limited coherence found in many schools was also noted by Wylie²² who found that some secondary school trustees were not clear about their responsibility for principal appraisal. Although trustees saw providing strategic direction as a key role, they were less likely to see scrutinising school performance and overseeing the principal as key roles, even though many trustees had human resource experience.

School culture

ERO identified additional school factors likely to contribute to a school culture of ongoing improvement. These were not necessarily linked directly to principal appraisal, but were more likely to occur in schools with effective principal appraisal. First and foremost were the high expectations evident for all students. These schools also demonstrated a commitment to raising achievement through a planned approach to improving teaching and achievement including:

- good use of analysed data to identify needs, determine priorities, develop goals, inform resourcing and monitor progress and effectiveness
- strengthening and using school systems to support improvement, such as improving teacher appraisal to support teacher development
- PLD for leaders linked to strategic goals, such as leading and managing change
- targeted PLD on effective teaching, appraisal, and analysing data.

Table 1 presents some of the key steps principals had taken as part of a planned approach to improvement.

20 See ERO's report on the quality of teacher appraisal: Supporting school improvement through effective teacher appraisal.

21 Education Review Office (2013) *Board Employment Responsibilities: Linking Charter targets to appraisal in primary schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office

22 Wylie, C. (2013) *Secondary schools in 2012*. Wellington: NZCER.

Table 1: A planned approach to a school culture of ongoing improvement

School factor	Steps taken included:
Using analysed data to identify needs, determine priorities, develop goals, inform resourcing and monitor progress and effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analysing teaching practices based on observation to identify baseline and monitor changes after PLD • collating appraisal information to identify PLD needs • allocating responsibility for analysing data to support professional inquiry
Strengthening and using school systems to support improvement such as improving teacher appraisal to support teacher development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • developing and using guidelines for effective teaching to clarify expectations • clarifying expectations for appraisal to increase consistency across the school • allocating time for goal setting, discussion, observation, reflection and appraisal documentation to occur • allocating responsibility to monitor appraisal quality and completion • providing useful templates and tools
PLD for leaders linked to strategic goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessing PLD related to leading and effectively managing change linked to strategic goals
Targeted PLD on effective teaching, appraisal, and analysing data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessing training on effective appraisal for senior and middle leaders • providing training on effective appraisal for all staff, including purposes, SMART goals, indicators to monitor progress

The following are examples of a primary school and a secondary school that were successfully able to interlink the elements listed above.

Primary school (medium size, rural, full primary)

Self-review information about student achievement informs the strategic plan and targets. The principal's appraisal goals include her leadership to improve teaching. She does this very effectively through her 'learning walks' and observations that are well documented and enable her to identify good practice and where to provide support.

Systems and processes in this school are tightly woven with good alignment across all aspects. The clear alignment of all school processes makes it easier to determine the principal's appraisal goals that focus entirely on school improvement.

Appropriate PLD, identified through the appraisal process, further supports her own and staff development. Teacher appraisal goals support the school's strategic directions and contribute to the school-wide PLD plan. PLD is based on the school's strategic direction and goals and likely to lead to improved student outcomes. Leaders have PLD related to their appraisal and are given constructive feedback and coaching.

Secondary school (very large, main urban, secondary school)

The principal sees his key role as that of the professional leader. The vision, expectation and direction come from the top. His commitment and high expectations that all students will achieve has led to a school culture of shared responsibility for student learning.

Senior leaders are driving the emphasis on the analysis and use of data and the teaching as inquiry process to facilitate and monitor the impact of teaching. The student database provides useful and easily accessible student achievement data in a variety of iterations (by teacher, class, subject, gender, ethnicity etc) for teachers. A comprehensive teacher survey was carried out to identify current teaching practices. These were compared with effective teaching practices identified by research. This has helped the school to identify what needs to be done to improve teaching.

Teachers commented on the comprehensive guidelines provided for appraisal, the strong support and guidance of senior staff, and the way in which senior leaders continually reminded them of what needed to be done and when. PLD on appraisal, constructive feedback, and coaching has been provided for leaders and teachers.

The creation of a dedicated Teaching and Learning team which includes senior leaders and the Specialist Classroom Teacher further sharpens the focus. They identify and plan PLD and support that will help teachers to use student achievement data to develop and refine teaching practices that meet students' learning needs.

Time is made available for collegial discussion based on data about teaching practices and links with student achievement. Teachers recognise their responsibility to improve practice and have a strong sense of self efficacy.

PLD is provided for all teachers in teaching as inquiry and the setting of SMART goals, and for appraisers in the art of difficult conversations. This is helping to make appraisal an effective process.

Survey responses related to appraisal links to development

Board chairs reported that the principal's most recent performance agreement included goals related to:

- the school's strategic and annual plans (84 percent)
- leading learning and developing teaching (82 percent)
- outcomes for students (77 percent)
- students at risk of underachieving (68 percent)
- the principal's own professional learning or development (75 percent).

Board chairs of primary schools were more likely than those of secondary schools to report that the performance agreement included goals related to leading learning and developing teaching, building relationships with communities, and community feedback. Secondary school principals were more likely to have goals related to responding to government initiatives or an ERO report.

Sixty-two percent of board chairs said their documentation stated that goals should be SMART, i.e. specific, measurable, achievable but challenging.

3 PROCESS USED BY BOARDS TO APPRAISE PRINCIPALS

This section discusses the effective processes ERO found during the onsite investigations in schools. Additional information is also provided from the board chair survey about documentation of the processes which boards use to appraise the principal, sources of advice, and confidence in their appraisal process.

Requirements and guidelines for principal appraisal

The NZSTA Guidelines on *Primary Principals' Performance Review*²³ state that appraisal has both accountability and development purposes. The guidelines provide extensive guidance for boards including policies on principal review, establishing the performance agreement, determining objectives and indicators, employing a consultant, the review process, and reporting to the board.

The guidelines note the importance of developing a performance agreement that identifies links to the strategic goals, annual plan and staff/student performance. It should also include:

- professional standards (Collective Agreement Professional Standards and Registered Teacher Criteria) and how they will be assessed
- monitoring performance
- identifying professional development opportunities and needs
- ensuring feedback to develop a new performance agreement.

To effectively carry out their role as professional leaders, principals need to demonstrate a thorough understanding of current approaches to effective teaching and learning. This means principals need to have a Practising Certificate as a fully registered teacher, and their teaching performance must be assessed against the Registered Teacher Criteria.

The Guidelines note that effective appraisal involves self-appraisal, opportunities for discussion, and observation of teaching (where applicable). They explain that evidence should be robust and cross-checked to ensure verification; and may be collected through various methods including surveys, interviewing, focus groups, whānau or fono group feedback, observation of teaching (if appropriate) and/or documentary evidence.

23 NZSTA (2009) *Guidelines for Primary Boards of Trustees: Primary Principals' Performance Review*. Wellington: NZSTA.

The Guidelines state that while an external consultant may do the ‘hands on’ appraisal, the responsibility and final judgements still lies with the board. The external appraiser should work with the board to decide on the goals and must report back to the board.

The NZSTA *Good Practice Framework*²⁴ states that external appraisers brought in to assist the board should be contracted for a clearly identified need (e.g. objective view or to supplement the skills and knowledge of the board), and the board should provide terms of reference, goals or objectives, and a documented process to follow.

If a board has decided to use an external appraiser, NZSTA recommends that the board:

- selects a consultant who demonstrates their knowledge of good practice and is able to assist the principal on the formative aspect of their appraisal
- works with the consultant to gain knowledge and expertise in appraisal
- receives a written report on the appraisal information and results
- receives advice on how to address areas needing development and the most appropriate source of assistance
- asks questions to ensure they understand the findings.

NZSTA discourages the practice of neighbouring principals appraising each other, as it is difficult to maintain objectivity.

ERO's key findings: appraisal processes

Findings from the onsite reviews

- Effective appraisal processes included: SMART goals, the professional standards for principals, a wide range of information to judge progress or success, discussion based on data and useful recommendations for the following year.
- Many boards used an external appraiser. These schools often had more specific indicators and measures of progress in their guidelines and reported practices. However, ERO found that an external appraiser did not always undertake robust and effective appraisal.

Findings from the board chair surveys

- The majority of board chairs reported that they felt confident to undertake the principal's appraisal.
- A substantial majority of board chairs surveyed believed the process for appraising their principal was effective.
- Almost all schools surveyed had policies, procedures and guidelines for appraising the principal.
- Although many boards received some type of report related to the principal's appraisal, the quality and usefulness of the reports varied considerably.
- Some boards do not review how well their policies and procedures are followed.

Effective appraisal practices

In each school, ERO identified factors that enhanced boards' processes and the quality of the appraisal process. Aspects of the process that contributed to more effective principal appraisal processes were found in schools where:

- boards had developed a clear performance agreement with SMART and challenging goals
- performance was assessed in relation to the professional standards
- PLD and support needed was documented in a professional learning plan
- indicators and evidence of progress and success were related to student learning
- the appraiser/s collected a wide range of data including student achievement information, and obtained the views of stakeholders such as staff, students and parents
- useful recommendations or development steps for the following year were determined
- a report about the appraisal process and outcomes was shared with board trustees.

The following examples show how some board processes were managed in three primary schools.

The board chair has suitable support for the professional component of the principal's appraisal and is confidently involved in the process. The performance agreement is negotiated between the principal, board chair and appraiser. The appraisal identifies principles for enhancing the principal's leadership through links to the charter and annual plan and legislative requirements. Professional standards are part of the appraisal and are met. The policy and procedures for the principal's appraisal include observation protocols, and appraisal checklists. A summary of the principal's appraisal is reported to the board.

(Medium size, main urban, full primary school)

Principal appraisal assures the board that its goals and targets are met and are an important component of the principal's performance and accountability. The board chair and an experienced professional appraiser use appropriate criteria for judging principal performance. Feedback from trustees, staff, parents and students informs the judgements. The board is kept well informed of appraisal outcomes. (Large, main urban, contributing school)

Improving student achievement is central to the strategic plan and closely linked to the principal's appraisal goals. There are timelines, indicators and regular reports to the board required to measure progress against student targets and achievement.

(Very large, main urban, intermediate school)

In many secondary schools, the annual plan was seen as the key mechanism for the principal's professional accountability. The principal's performance agreement documented the principal's responsibilities related to the annual plan and monitored progress towards the goals. However, some goals related to management were expressed in general terms such as managing the school efficiently, ensuring all staff meet professional standards, and increasing the number of international students.

Weaknesses were found in a few schools where:

- the board chair was not suitably qualified or experienced to appraise the principal
- boards needed guidance about choosing an appropriate external appraiser
- boards were not familiar with legislation and guidelines on principal appraisal.

Involvement of external appraiser

Over half the boards surveyed involved an external appraiser in the principal's appraisal. This was usually to undertake the professional component of the appraisal. These people were often respected education professionals or consultants who were suitably qualified and experienced, and had credibility.

ERO found appraisal was effective when the external appraiser:

- followed a rigorous process
- gathered feedback from stakeholders
- provided challenging suggestions for improvement
- asked probing questions to stimulate the principal's thinking.

However, ERO found that external appraisal did not necessarily result in robust appraisal that contributed to improved teaching and learning. Weaknesses identified for some appraisers were seen where:

- a lack of objectivity was evident as they were close colleagues of the principal or had been used for many years
- conflict of interest arose when principals appraised each other reciprocally
- goals were expressed in general terms and had no links to school or department goals
- the appraiser lacked relevant professional knowledge or expertise
- no indication was evident of how success would be measured or who would be consulted in the gathering of evidence.
- information was gathered but not evaluated or used to inform next steps
- the quality and usefulness of feedback was poor
- no next steps were identified for leadership to improve teaching, day-to-day management or the principal's teaching.

Boards with relevant experience and knowledge were able to appraise the principal effectively, and felt confident to do so on their own.

The principal's appraisal is done by the board chair. It follows a clear process which is honest and open, aligns with school strategic priorities, and shows trust between board and principal. A key strength of the process is the questioning by the chair (who does not have educational knowledge) and then discussion between the board chair and principal to clarify. The questions arising from the principal's report and the answers given through discussion are clear and indicate this was a robust appraisal. (Large, main urban, contributing school)

The board tried various appraisers over the last few years but weren't satisfied with the format and feedback they received. So with the expertise they had on the board they developed their own system and a process agreed with the principal. It includes a number of key areas to focus on, negotiated objectives and expected outcomes. (Medium size, main urban, composite school)

Appraisal of the principal's teaching

In some schools the principal's teaching had been appraised appropriately. In these schools the appraiser had the appropriate knowledge and expertise, teaching was observed, the RTC were used as the basis for appraisal, and next steps for development were identified.

In some other schools the appraisal had not been carried out by an appropriate person, or was not robust. In a small number of cases another teacher in the school was charged with appraising the principal's teaching performance. This process can have limitations because of possible power relationships or conflicts of interest.

Board role in principal appraisal

Schools used a variety of personnel to appraise the principal. In well over half of the schools the board chair was involved in carrying out the principal's most recent appraisal. Although in some instances all the trustees were involved in setting the appraisal goals, other board members were involved in other parts of the process in just under one-fifth of the schools surveyed. Some schools had a two or three-year cycle where they rotated between using an external appraiser or the board chair.

Just over half of the boards surveyed involved an external contractor or consultant, and ten percent involved a principal of another school. Over one-third of the boards selected the external contractors because they were known to the principal and almost one-third reported that the contractor was already known to the board. A small number of boards selected a PLD provider who was working with the school to be the appraiser. These people were often involved with all aspects of the appraisal, though some had particular roles such as interviewing staff and parents, mentoring and coaching, and evaluating performance.

The cost to the board for the principal's appraisal ranged from no cost except time to \$5,000, with a median of \$1,800. The review impacted on the principal's remuneration in one-quarter of secondary and six percent of primary schools.

Board confidence to undertake appraisal

Most boards surveyed felt very confident or confident about undertaking each of the aspects of the principal's most recent appraisal. Boards felt most confident about assessing how well the principal managed the school and built relationships with the community. Boards were least confident about developing appropriate indicators of progress or success, and identifying PLD and support for the principal.

Whether or not boards used an external appraiser made no difference to board confidence about undertaking various aspects of the appraisal.

Boards surveyed saw their main challenges in appraising the principal as being their knowledge and understanding of education, the turnover of trustees, and finding a suitable appraiser. The main suggestions boards made for additional support were for more specific training, and for straightforward relevant information being in one place.

The level of confidence which board chairs indicated matches recent findings from NZSTA who reported²⁵ that only about one-fifth of participants at their annual conference identified principal performance review as one of their greatest professional development needs.

Board views on the effectiveness of their appraisal process

A large majority of boards surveyed about the most recent appraisal of their principal believed the process was effective. However, one-quarter considered it did not effectively identify appropriate PLD and support, and one-sixth reported that it did not identify learning and development goals, for the principal. See Appendix 2.

There were no differences between schools using and not using an external appraiser in terms of how effective boards felt the appraisal process used was, the assurance provided to the board, and improved teaching and learning.

Sources of information and advice (board survey)

Seventy percent of boards surveyed had received training for their role as employer, and 41 percent had received training to carry out the principal's performance review. Board chairs who had received training to carry out the appraisal were more likely to have been involved in the appraisal – 75 percent compared with 53 percent of those with no specific training.

A majority of board chairs surveyed had found useful sources of support and advice to appraise the principal. Boards were more likely to have found useful advice from published resources than from people and agencies. One quarter of chairs surveyed had not accessed any useful information and advice.

When an external appraiser was not used, boards obtained useful information from other sources, such as the principal of another school, and resources from NZSTA and the Ministry of Education.

The five most useful sources of advice and support for boards when appraising the principal were, in order of usefulness:

- NZSTA courses
- Principal of another school
- NZSTA personnel/industrial advisor, help desk
- Principal professional learning communities
- University/PLD providers.

25 NZSTA (2013) *STANEWS* NZSTA professional development survey – Conference 2013, September, Wellington: NZSTA.

Other useful sources included trustees of another school, Ministry of Education staff, New Zealand Principals' Federation staff, and first time principal mentors.²⁶

Around half the board chairs had used key resources about appraisal and managing staff, published by NZSTA and the Ministry of Education. For a list of resources used see Appendix 2.

Documentation of policies, procedures and guidelines for appraisal

Generally board policies and procedures included most of the principal appraisal requirements. Schools varied in the amount of detail provided in their guidelines. All but four schools surveyed had policies, procedures and guidelines for appraising the principal. Over three-quarters of the responding schools' policies and procedures included the requirements to include discussion with the board chair, engaging an external appraiser, and identifying PLD and support for the principal. Less than half included obtaining feedback from parents and students (see Appendix 2).

Board policies and procedures were not as clear about the board trustees' role in the processes. Although most procedures included using an external appraiser, only just over half referred to the board's role in deciding the focus for the appraisal or obtaining feedback from trustees for the appraisal. In these schools it is unlikely that trustees would be able to be involved in the final judgement about the appraisal or able to respond to next development steps identified for the principal.

Most board chairs surveyed reported that they had incorporated at least one way of assessing achievement of goals or progress towards them in the principal's performance agreement.

These included:

- having goals broken down into measurable objectives
- developing indicators to measure progress towards or achievement of goals/objectives
- developing indicators that include specific information about student achievement or engagement
- outlining sources of information to consider when appraising the principal.

Most board chairs surveyed believed they assessed the principal's performance using evidence about leadership and outcomes for students, such as:

- data about student progress and achievement against targets (76 percent)
- information about student learning outcomes, progress or achievement (75 percent)
- information about the principal's role as professional leader (73 percent).

²⁶ The First-time Principals' Programme is a nation-wide, 18 month induction programme for new principals. One of its elements is a mentoring programme that includes one school-based visit, participation in three professional learning groups and an online community, email, Skype and telephone support.

The survey results suggest that appraisal of secondary school principals tended to be based on more sources of evidence than appraisal of primary principals, particularly evidence from:

- indicators related to student achievement
- information about the principal's role as professional leader
- feedback from the board, staff, students, and parents.

The survey also indicated that when an external consultant was used, the appraisal process tended to have better documentation. The policies, procedures and guidelines tended to include more details, a wider range of information contributed to the appraisal, and the goals covered more aspects.

Board chairs' responses showed that when an external appraiser was used indicators and measures of progress were more specific and included using student achievement as part of the evidence.

Reporting to the board

Key information for the board is the report on the principal's appraisal. The NZSTA Good Practice Framework²⁷ states that the final appraisal report, or a summary of it, should always be provided to the board 'in committee'.

Processes for reporting on the principal's appraisal varied from school to school. Often a summary was provided for the chair and usually, but not always, the board received a summary of the principal's appraisal in the in-committee part of a board meeting. Some boards received the full report. Some boards were only informed that the process had occurred, while others received reports about progress towards the goals. In some schools the trustees had an opportunity to discuss the report.

The board of trustees needs high quality information to make judgements about how well strategic goals and targets have been met, to set future goals for improvement and to make sound decisions about resourcing. This is reinforced by a judgement of the High Court in 1998 which included the following observation:

As the chief executive of the school, the principal shall keep the Board of Trustees fully informed of all important matters relevant to the management of the school in an appropriate and timely manner, so that the Board members in carrying out their responsibilities, will be able to ask questions, gather information, receive information, form opinions and views, express those opinions and views where appropriate and generally be involved in all the processes essential for a body in which are reposed serious, important and far-reaching responsibilities.²⁸

27 NZSTA (2008) *Managing Principal Appraisal (Performance Review) – Good practice framework*. Wellington: NZSTA.

28 Ministry of Education (2010) *Effective governance: Working in partnership*, Wellington: Ministry of Education.

Some boards had not established expectations about what aspects of appraisal should be reported to them. In schools where trustees have little involvement in the appraisal process they have limited opportunity to use principal appraisal to facilitate progress towards meeting their goals and vision. Board guidelines should clarify what information they need so that they can review progress and resource the improvement goals.

ERO's findings: Principal appraisal and self review

It appears likely that boards do little self review to determine how well their appraisal policies and procedures are followed in practice. Although the survey responses indicate that the appraisal procedures and guidelines meet most of the suggested guidelines, ERO's onsite school investigations found actual practices did not necessarily match the intended guidelines, and appraisal was less effective than it could have been.

Boards need to regularly review how the principal's appraisal is carried out to determine how the guidelines have been followed and whether they contribute to improved teaching and outcomes for students. When they identify any modifications to improve the process, these should be documented in the guidelines and implemented in practice.

Boards can also build expertise by working with the external appraiser. If boards work with an external appraiser at the beginning of the three-year board election cycle, they are then likely to be more knowledgeable and confident to undertake future appraisals. This makes it important for boards to select an appraiser that both they and the principal are able to work with effectively.

Conclusion

The quality of principal appraisal varies considerably across New Zealand schools. The schools with the most improvement-focused appraisal understood the importance of the principal's role in achieving school goals and the need to provide meaningful support for the principal.

In some other schools, where appraisals did not focus on development or the process lacked rigour, improvements were not as likely. Selecting an external appraiser who is a colleague of the principal or setting goals that are 'business as usual' rather than challenging were also unlikely to improve outcomes.

Principal appraisal contributed more effectively to improved staff development and outcomes for students when:

- it was part of a coherent planned approach to improvement
- appraisal goals were challenging, specific, and linked to strategic goals about improving teaching and learning
- assessment of goals or progress was based on a range of information about teacher practices and student learning
- more guidance was provided for boards and principals about effectively carrying out their responsibilities, especially about agreeing on appropriate goals.

Raising achievement

Although most of the board chairs surveyed recognised the need to have goals focused on student achievement, the majority of schools which ERO visited did not include such a specific focus on the principal's appraisal goals. The schools with the most effective appraisal used good analysis of student achievement information to identify priority learners and their needs. They then used the appraisal process to identify teacher goals and professional development needs. Later the principal arranged relevant PLD, supported teachers to use new strategies, and evaluated the impact of these strategies on learning. The principal's effectiveness as a leader, in facilitating progress towards these teacher goals, was then considered.

The boards with the most effective appraisal carefully linked the appraisal goals to agreed strategic goals. They recognised that aligning principal appraisal with strategic plans created synergies that facilitated progress towards school and staff development. The principal's performance appraisal was a pivotal part of the system. When the strategic goals, annual plan, performance agreement and performance review were linked coherently, there was more focus on important activities and goals were more likely to be achieved.

Leaders play a key role in supporting teachers to inquire into how their practices contribute to improvements for students. In another report, ERO identified that the key to effective inquiry²⁹ is that it happens in a systematic and continuous manner and that it leads to changed and improved thinking and teaching. As a result, principals in the most successful schools showed the same commitment to inquiring into their own practice through their appraisal. They sought robust feedback and aimed to make continuous improvements themselves. In these schools the principal's appraisal successfully modelled the types of inquiry behaviours which leaders expect of teachers and their students.

At the other end of the continuum, leaders took part in appraisals that showed limited expectation on themselves as change agents in the school. All leaders should expect to challenge themselves to make ongoing improvements that will make a difference for students in their school.

Board processes

The survey responses indicate that most boards are clear about their responsibility for the school's strategic direction. Policies and procedures generally meet requirements. However, some boards are not clear about their role when appraising the principal or how the appraisal could effectively enhance progress towards achieving the school's strategic goals. As a result some trustees have limited involvement in either setting appraisal goals, contributing their views as part of the process, or opportunities to know how well the principal was meeting the school's goals.

Boards need to review whether agreed appraisal processes are being followed and set clear expectations about reporting appraisal outcomes to the board. When boards were well informed about the principal's successes and development needs they were better able to understand how well they are using resources strategically to bring about positive outcomes for students.

29 ERO (2012) *Teaching as Inquiry: Responding to learners*, Wellington: Education Review Office.

NEXT STEPS

ERO recommends that the New Zealand School Trustees Association:

1. Use opportunities provided through newsletters and training to regularly remind boards of their responsibility for principals' appraisal and the guidelines available to support them.
2. Review the advice they provide about principals' appraisal, to ensure it includes guidance on using appraisal to strengthen progress towards the school's strategic goals. Guidelines should include:
 - how to link appraisal goals to the school's strategic goals and targets
 - examples of specific, challenging goals linked to raising student achievement and to use of student achievement information as an indicator to measure progress or achievement
 - how boards can work effectively with an external appraiser
 - what should be reported to the board to ensure they meet their responsibility for appraisal and monitor progress towards the strategic goals.
3. Ensure the latest resources can be easily identified, and accessed through the NZSTA website, with links from the Ministry of Education's and the New Zealand Teachers Council websites.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

1. Ensures Ministry documentation and PLD (such as information for new trustees and leadership PLD) includes information about the importance of effective principals' appraisal.

ERO recommends that boards of trustees:

1. Strengthen links between principal appraisal goals and the school's strategic priorities
2. Carefully develop goals, especially around improving teaching and learning, that are challenging and specific
3. Use student achievement information as an indicator and evidence of goal achievement or progress
4. Identify appropriate PLD for the principal, to support progress towards the school's goals and the principal's appraisal goals
5. Develop processes for ongoing reporting of progress towards both the principal's goals and the school's strategic goals
6. Clarify what should be reported to the board about the principal's appraisal and how discussion of the appraisal will contribute to next steps for the school and the principal.
7. Ensure the final appraisal report identifies clearly which principal and school goals have been achieved, which have not, and the next steps
8. Use ERO's evaluation questions and indicators and board chair survey to review their principal appraisal practices and outcomes (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Appendix 1: Evaluative Questions and Indicators

The indicators were based on research which showed the relationship between appraisal goals, the achievement of the goals and outcomes of the appraisal. The selected indicators focused on improvement and included elements that were most likely to result in appraisal having more impact on development of the principal and improved teaching and learning.

To what extent did the board's most recent appraisal of the principal contribute to:

- a. The principal's own development
- b. Staff and school development
- c. Improved student achievement

- Performance agreement negotiated and signed
- Realistic number of challenging but achievable goals
- Goals are measurable or can be verified by objective measures
- Goals are specific and include both learning goals and performance goals
- Principal's development goals and appraisal support the school's strategic direction
- Suitable balance of goals linked to principal's development, school and staff development, outcomes for students
- Goals include leadership to improve teaching, day-to-day management (and teaching if applicable)
- Goals include improving outcomes for students especially Māori, Pacific, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, students at risk of under-achieving, students with special needs (priority learners)
- Indicators to measure progress towards goals include specific student learning
- Appraiser and appraisee identify challenging goals/directions for improvement
- Appraisal identifies support and PLD needed
- Teaching is appraised appropriately – observation of teaching and by appropriate appraiser (where applicable)
- Principal professional development (PLD, conferences, other) relates directly to development goals
- Feedback obtained from staff, students and parents
- Progress from goals for one year feeds into goals for next year

What factors enhance the implementation of robust appraisal that supports improving student learning? These are examples – others may be relevant.

- Principal's leadership of, and commitment to, high expectations for all students
- Principal's expectation that all students will achieve
- School culture of collegial discussion about teaching practices and connections to student learning based on data
- Shared responsibility for student learning
- Leaders' capacity to analyse and use data to explore links with teaching
- Leaders' knowledge and competency in appraisal
- Time made available for discussing teaching and links with student achievement
- PLD on appraisal, constructive feedback, and coaching provided for leaders and teachers
- Teachers recognise their responsibility to improve practice
- Teachers have strong sense of self efficacy
- Other factors specific to the school

What factors hinder the implementation of robust appraisal that supports improving student learning? These are examples – others may be relevant.

- Goals that are not connected to student learning
- Goals that do not identify specific measurable outcomes
- Vague goals that do not provide challenges for teachers
- Limited use of data on student achievement
- Low trust among staff
- Leaders' lack of knowledge and competency to carry out appraisal effectively
- Other factors specific to the school

How coherent [well-aligned] are the school's charter, strategic plan, targets, appointments, appraisal and PLD in supporting high quality teaching, ongoing improvement and raised student achievement?

- Strategic plan and targets informed by self review and information about student achievement
- Appraisal goals support the school's strategic direction
- PLD based on school's strategic direction and goals and likely to lead to improved student outcomes
- Appraisal goals used to develop school-wide PLD plan
- Actions from PLD agreed and monitored as part of appraisal
- Leaders have PLD related to appraisal, providing constructive feedback and coaching
- PLD includes analysing student achievement data and using it for strategic planning, resource allocation and teaching
- Board provided with information to inform resourcing decisions, including PLD
- Time allocated for PLD and professional learning communities
- PLD outcomes for principal and staff evaluated and reported to board
- Induction and mentoring programme for provisionally registered teachers and new teachers based on appraisal and school priorities

Appendix 2: Responses of Board Chairs to Online Survey

Introduction/purpose of the survey

- to find out how boards review the performance of their principals
- to investigate links between appraisal and improving the quality of teaching and raising student achievement
- to obtain information that can be used to support boards in their role as employer

Documentation: Policies, procedures and guidelines

Table 1: Policies, procedures and guidelines for appraising the principal include statement that purposes of appraisal include:

	% all schools
Providing accountability by the principal to the board	86
Providing for the development of the principal	92
Improving student learning	84
Assuring the board that the Professional Standards for Principals are being met	92

Table 2: Policies, procedures and guidelines for appraising the principal include statement that appraisal goals and objectives should be:

	% all schools
SMART: specific, measurable, achievable but challenging	62
Relevant, i.e. support/align with the principal's performance goals and school priorities	84
Related to student learning or outcomes for students	77
Related to the relevant Professional Standards	80

Table 3: Policies, procedures and guidelines for appraising the principal include statement that appraisal process will include:

	% all schools
The timetable to be followed	73
A description of roles and responsibilities of the board chair, board and principal	68
Engaging an external appraiser for some or all of the process	80
Deciding on the focus for external appraisal	53
Identifying PLD and support needed	76
The sources of information to be used to contribute to the review	56
Obtaining feedback from board members	60
Obtaining feedback from staff	71
Obtaining feedback from parents, whānau	48
Obtaining feedback from students	42
Guidelines about confidentiality	68
Discussion of the appraisal with the board chair	84
A summary of the appraisal report will be provided to the full board in committee	70
A process for resolving disputes	57

Practice and implementation: Latest appraisal

Table 4: The principal's annual performance agreement included goals related to:

	% all schools
Day-to-day management	57
The school's strategic and annual plans	84
Leading learning and developing teaching	82
Teaching as inquiry	54
Developing a curriculum that builds on community strengths, interests, and aspirations	63
Outcomes for students	77
Students at risk of underachieving (eg Māori, Pacific, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with special needs)	68
Analysing and using data to inform self review and ongoing improvement	64
The principal's own professional learning or development	75
Building relationships with communities	66
Government initiatives or an ERO report	48
Community feedback	44

Table 5: The principal's annual performance agreement included assessing progress towards or achievement of goals by:

	% all schools
Goals broken down into measurable objectives	70
Indicators to measure progress towards or achievement of goals/objectives	71
Indicators that include specific information about student achievement or engagement	61
Sources of information to consider when appraising the principal	46

Table 6: Sources of information and evidence used to assess the principal's progress and performance

	% all schools
Self-review information about progress towards or achievement of goals	81
Data about student progress and achievement against targets set by the board	76
Information about student learning outcomes, progress or achievement	75
Information about principal's role as professional leader	73
Observation of principal at staff meetings for PLD	31
Feedback from board	71
Feedback from teachers	69
Feedback from students	39
Feedback from parents, whānau	41
Records of study, courses, conferences	49
Information about teaching practice (if applicable)	12

Appraisal identified PLD for the principal: 85 percent

Principal's appraisal impacted on their remuneration: 9 percent

Appraisal was more likely to impact on remuneration for secondary school principals than for primary school principals.

Table 7: Who was involved in carrying out the most recent appraisal

	% all schools
The board chair	62
Other board member/s	18
An external contractor/independent consultant	56
Current or former principal of another school	10

Table 8: External contractor selected because they were:

	% all schools
Known to the board	30
Known to the principal	35
Professional Learning and Development (PLD) provider working with the school	13

Table 9: Aspects of the principal's appraisal the external appraiser was involved with:

Gathering evidence		Process		Role	
Collecting evidence	8	Setting goals	13	With the board chair	9
Feedback from stakeholders	14	Evaluate/monitor performance	12	Mentor	7
Staff	6	Present/discuss report with	10	Sounding board/ advice/ guidance	7
Trustees	3	Present summary to board	10	PLD/coaching	7
Parents	3				

In 39 schools, external appraisers were involved with all aspects of the appraisal.

Table 10: Usefulness of information and advice in helping to appraise the principal

People/organisations (percent)	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Not used
NZSTA course/seminar/webinar	12	25	3	59
NZSTA personnel/industrial advisor, helpdesk	9	18	1	72
Principal of another school	10	22	1	67
Ministry of Education staff	2	8	3	87
NZ Principals' Federation staff	4	6	1	89
Secondary Principals' Association New Zealand staff	0	2	2	96
First time Principal mentors or mentor groups	3	7	3	88
Principal professional learning communities	4	22	2	72
Māori Leadership Forum	1	3	1	95
Iwi education authorities	1	3	1	95
Pacific communities	0	4	1	95
University/PLD providers	6	16	1	77
Trustee of another school	3	8	4	86
Association of Integrated Schools	1	6	0	93

Table 11: Usefulness of resources in helping to appraise the principal

Print and website material (percent)	Very useful	Useful	Not useful	Not used
Ministry of Education <i>Effective Governance Recruiting and Managing School Staff: A guide for Boards of Trustees</i> , 2012	10	45	3	42
Ministry of Education/NZSTA <i>Managing Principal Appraisal (Performance Review) – Good Practice Framework</i> , 2007	11	40	2	47
NZSTA, <i>Guidelines for Boards of Trustees, Managing Principal Appraisal</i> , 2005	10	37	4	49
NZSTA other material	12	32	1	55
<i>Principals Collective Agreement – Primary</i>	13	44	3	40
<i>Principals Collective Agreement – Secondary</i>	1	8	5	86
<i>Principals Collective Agreement – Area</i>	3	5	4	89
Ministry of Education Kiwi Leadership	4	11	4	81
Ministry of Education <i>A Series of Guidelines on Performance Management Systems</i> , 1997	1	17	2	80
Ministry of Education other material	1	30	3	67
<i>Tātaiako Cultural Competencies for Teachers of Māori Learners</i>	2	13	3	82
NZ Principals' Federation material	3	8	3	86
NZ Secondary Principals' Council, <i>Advice Regarding Performance Appraisal</i> , 2011	0	5	3	92
NZ Secondary Principals' Council, <i>Principals' Career and Appraisal Toolkit</i> , 2011	0	3	3	94
NZ Secondary Principals Council/PTA material	0	1	4	95

Table 12: Training received by board members

	% all schools
Their role as employer	70
Performance review of the principal	41

Table 13: Board's confidence to undertake each aspect of the principal's most recent appraisal

Aspect (percent)	Very confident	Confident	Had reservations	Not confident
Establishing annual performance agreement	25	59	12	4
Identifying learning and development goals for the principal that support the school's strategic direction	24	64	9	3
Identifying specific rather than general goals	23	61	14	3
Identifying appropriate PLD and support for the principal	20	57	18	5
Identifying and developing appropriate indicators of progress or success	18	56	22	4
Assessing how well the principal provides leadership for learning	25	63	9	3
Assessing how well the principal promotes effective teaching	26	62	9	3
Assessing how effectively the principal manages the school	37	56	5	2
Assessing how well the principal builds relationships with the community	33	58	7	2
Assessing how well the principal builds relationships with the local iwi	20	61	13	6
Discussing progress and identifying next steps	26	62	9	3
Providing high quality feedback to the principal	27	52	19	2

Table 14: Effectiveness of the board's appraisal of the principal

(percent)	Very confident	Confident	Had reservations	Not confident
Process				
Ensuring expectations of the principal are clear	41	53	6	0
Identifying learning and development goals for the principal	34	49	16	1
Identifying appropriate PLD and support for the principal	32	45	22	2
Improving the use of data to inform self review	38	49	11	2
Recognising the principal's achievement	43	49	7	1
Accountability				
Providing accountability in leading and managing the school	41	54	5	1
Assuring the board that the principal is achieving agreed goals identified in the principal's performance agreement	43	50	6	1
Assurance that the principal is meeting the Professional Standards for Principals	46	42	11	2
Assurance that the principal is meeting the Professional Standards for Teachers (if appropriate)	34	46	19	1
Outcomes				
Improving the quality of teaching	38	53	8	1
Improving outcomes for all students	41	48	10	2
Improving outcomes for students at risk of under-achievement e.g. Māori, Pacific, learners from low socio-economic backgrounds, students with special needs	38	46	14	2
Accelerating progress for students not achieving at curriculum expectations	37	49	12	2

Appendix 3: Methodology

Key evaluative questions

The overarching question for ERO's evaluation of principal appraisal was 'How effectively does appraisal of the principal contribute to development?'

Separate judgements were made about the contribution of principal appraisal to the principal's own development, staff and school development, and improved student achievement.

Four other evaluative questions also provided some relevant information:

- How coherent are the school's charter, strategic plan, targets, appointments, appraisal, and PLD in supporting high quality teaching, ongoing improvement, and raised student achievement?
- What factors enhance the implementation of robust appraisal that supports improving student learning?
- What factors hinder the implementation of robust appraisal that supports improving student learning?
- How knowledgeable and well-prepared are boards and principals for their role as employer?

Sources of information

Information for this report was drawn from three main sources:

- an online survey of a sample of board chairs about appraising the principal (154 chairs, 52 percent response rate)
- an evaluation of appointment processes and practices in 27 selected secondary schools in Term 1, 2013
- an evaluation of appointment processes and practices in 173 primary schools having a regular review in Term 1, 2013.

Online survey

The online survey gathered detailed information from boards about their documented policies and procedures, the principal's most recent performance appraisal, involvement of an external appraiser, sources of information and advice, board training, board confidence in appraising the principal, and their view of the appraisal's effectiveness. The questions were largely based on NZSTA's Guidelines on Managing Principal Appraisal and Good Practice Framework (see Appendix 4: Useful resources).³⁰

Only 52 percent of boards responded. Rural and small schools are under-represented in the responses (see Appendix 3). The number of responses is too small for robust analysis of sub-groups, but there were no consistent trends in terms of location or size of school.

Appendix 2 presents the survey questions and responses of board chairs.

³⁰ NZSTA 2009, *Guidelines for Primary Boards of Trustees: Primary Principals' Performance Review*
NZSTA 2005, *Guidelines for Boards of Trustees: Managing Principal Appraisal*
NZSTA 2008, *Managing Principal Appraisal (Performance Review) – Good practice framework*

Investigations in schools

The investigations in primary and secondary schools enabled reviewers to interview trustees and staff and review documentation so that they could make judgements about the key evaluative questions. Appendix 1 shows the indicators for each evaluative question.

Appraisal of principals was evaluated in 173 primary schools as part of the school's regular education review. These investigations did not include any schools with an early return of one-to-two years signalled in their previous ERO review report, or any schools where ERO had signalled in the previous review that their next review would be within four-to-five years as the latter schools were not due for a review in 2013.³¹

As few secondary schools were scheduled for review in Term 1, a sample of 27 secondary schools was selected for a special investigation. Analysis of the most recent review report of these 27 schools showed that their overall performance tended to be more effective than secondary schools overall. The previous review reports of one third of these schools had signalled a return after four-to-five years compared with 15 percent nationally. It is therefore probable that the secondary schools visited are more effective than all secondary schools nationally, and give a more positive picture than would be true for all schools.

Schools reviewed and schools responding to surveys

Sampling

An online survey about principal appraisal was provided for a random sample of board chairs. The sample error was six percent for primary schools and 14 percent for secondary schools.

Responses were received from trustees at 153 schools (52 percent response).

31 Nationally, each of these groups consists of approximately 15 percent of schools.

Table 15: Schools reviewed and board chairs responding to the survey

	Primary schools reviewed	Secondary schools reviewed	Board chairs responding	National percentage Term 4, 2012
	N=173	N=27	153 responses	N=2430
School type			%	%
Full primary	99		43	44
Contributing	48		37	32
Intermediate, middle school	14		7	5
Special	2			2
Composite (Year 1-15, Year 1-10)	7	1	1	5
Secondary (Year 7-15)	3	7	3	4
Secondary (Year 9-15, Year 11-15)	0	19	8	9
Location of school				
Main urban	80	19	62	53
Secondary urban	13	1	10	7
Minor urban	18	5	10	12
Rural	62	2	17	29
Size of school				
Very small	17	0	3	10
Small (101-400)	43	2	13	25
Medium (401-800)	72	12	55	37
Large(801-1500)	28	9	19	19
Very large (1501+)	13	4	10	9
Decile grouping				
Low decile (deciles 1-3)	40	6	24	31
Medium decile (deciles 4-7)	83	10	39	40
High decile (deciles 8-10)	50	11	37	29

Note: percentages do not always add to 100 because of rounding.

Differences between the responding schools and schools nationally were tested using chi square tests. Differences that were statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) are described below.

The primary schools visited also included seven composite schools, three Years 7-15 secondary schools, and two special schools. More of the primary schools included were full primary schools (Years 1-8) than nationally (61 percent compared with 54 percent), and fewer were contributing schools (Years 1-6) – 30 percent compared with 39 percent. The sample also included slightly fewer low decile and more medium decile schools than nationally. This is consistent with the exclusion from the evaluation of schools with longitudinal reviews (those ERO returns to after one-to-two years), which occur more often in low decile schools.

Trustee survey

Only 52 percent of boards responded. Rural and small schools were under-represented in the responses. The number of responses is too small for robust analysis of sub-groups, but there were no consistent trends in responses by location or size of school. Characteristics of schools tend to be linked. For example, most rural schools are small and most secondary schools are larger and in main urban areas.

Appendix 4: Useful Resources for Principal Appraisal

Davies, C (2013) *Principal Performance Agreement: The Board's Role*, presentation at NZSTA Conference 2013, NZSTA.

NZSTA (2013) *Trusteeship: a guide for school trustees*, NZSTA.

NZSTA (2009) *Guidelines for Primary Boards of Trustees: Primary Principals' Performance Review*.

NZSTA 2008 *Managing Principal Appraisal (Performance Review) – Good practice framework*.

NZSTA 2005, *Guidelines for Boards of Trustees: Managing Principal Appraisal*.

Ministry of Education 1997, *A Series of Guidelines on Performance Management Systems*.

Sinnema CEL, and Robinson VMJ, 2012 Goal setting in principal evaluation: goal quality and predictors of achievement, *Leadership and Policy in schools*, 11: 2012.

Research about principal appraisal

Anderson, C. (2009) *The New Zealand Principal's Experience of the school board as employer*, report to NZ Principals' Federation and NZ Secondary Principals' Council, School Governance Solutions.

Bonallack, L. (2010), *Principal appraisal: a personal look at the effectiveness of appraisals conducted by the author over the last seven years*.

Schagen S. and Wylie C (2010) *School resources, culture and connections*, Wellington: NZCER

Wylie C, Brewerton M, Hodgen E (2011) *Shifts in educational leadership practices survey patterns in the experienced Principals' Development Programme 2009-2010*, Report prepared for Ministry of Education, Wellington: NZCER.

Wylie, C. and Hodgen, E. (2010) *Educational Leadership Practices Survey baseline 2009 overall profile of schools in the Experienced Principals' Development Programme*, Report prepared for Ministry of Education NZCER.

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