

**Promoting Pacific  
Student  
Achievement:  
Schools' Progress**

**June 2010**

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## Overview

As part of every school's education review, the Education Review Office (ERO) investigates and reports on the achievement of Pacific students and what boards of trustees and school leaders have done to improve education outcomes for these students.

This is the second of two evaluations on the achievement, engagement and presence of Pacific students'. In the September 2009 report *Progress in Pacific Student Achievement – A pilot evaluation of Auckland Schools*, ERO focused on 32 schools, the initiatives they undertook to improve outcomes for Pacific students, and how effectively these brought about the desired improvement. ERO concluded that good quality teaching strategies and strong partnerships with parents and communities were the factors that contributed most to improving the engagement and achievement of these students.

In this evaluation, undertaken throughout 2009, ERO evaluated Pacific students' presence, achievement and engagement in schools nationally. ERO wanted to know what initiatives schools had put in place in the last three years since their previous review. An important difference between the two evaluations was that the overall ratio of Pacific students on school rolls was significantly higher in the pilot study undertaken in Auckland than in schools generally.<sup>1</sup>

This study showed some improvements in the attendance of Pacific students. Many schools had fewer Pacific students involved in disciplinary actions. Overall schools were taking action earlier if problems arose; resulting in more stand-downs but fewer suspensions and exclusions for Pacific students. Attendance was not an issue in 30 percent of the schools. However, 40 percent of schools either did not monitor, or could not demonstrate any improvement in Pacific students' attendance.

Some schools had initiated programmes aimed explicitly at improving outcomes for Pacific students. These included increasing teacher and/or trustees' knowledge of Pacific cultures, setting high achievement expectations, reinforcing effective teaching strategies, and extra provision for English and/or Pacific languages programmes. Initiatives to improve students' engagement usually entailed integrating elements of Pacific cultures and languages in school and classroom programmes.

While most schools were involved in initiatives to raise Pacific students' literacy and numeracy achievement many of these were school-wide projects where gains were often noted for Pacific students along with other students. As the focus was not on Pacific students specifically, this group of students tended to remain at the lower end of the achievement range even though their achievement rose.

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<sup>1</sup> In a quarter of the Auckland pilot schools, Pacific students comprised more than two thirds of the roll. In this evaluation just over half of the schools had rolls of between one and five percent Pacific students.

Many schools did not know what impact their initiatives were having on Pacific students' achievement. ERO found that over half the schools did not know if Pacific students had improved in literacy and numeracy. Reasons for the limited monitoring of Pacific students' achievement included: difficulties for schools with very small number of Pacific students on the roll; little use of data before and after an initiative; and not collating data about individual students to identify trends and patterns. Minimal monitoring meant that fewer than 20 percent of schools were able to demonstrate improved literacy and numeracy achievement levels for Pacific students.

Schools that succeeded in raising Pacific student achievement generally had close links with parents, families and communities. Some schools had a Pacific liaison person who assisted with engaging parents in students' learning and in the life of the school. Effective schools had a variety of ways to create and maintain a climate that was inclusive and welcoming for Pacific students and their families.

Initiatives in schools resulted in 17 percent of boards having more Pacific representatives than at the time of the school's previous ERO review. Board members' levels of knowledge about Pacific student achievement and understanding of related issues had substantially improved in nine percent of all the schools. Trustees in these boards were well placed to make informed strategic decisions about how to improve outcomes for Pacific students.

## Recommendations

ERO recommends that school leaders:

- improve how they collect, analyse and use Pacific students' achievement information;
- improve school processes to enable students to know about their progress and achievement and how to manage their learning;
- build teachers' and boards' knowledge of the strengths and needs of Pacific students, and how to use this knowledge to benefit these students;
- strengthen links with Pacific parents and communities to facilitate communication and build mutual understanding about the best ways to support their children's learning; and
- use the contextual flexibility inherent in *The New Zealand Curriculum* to design and implement teaching and learning programmes that reflect Pacific students voices and aspects of cultures and languages relevant to their learning.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- work with schools to increase school leaders' and teachers' understanding of the importance of partnership with Pacific communities; and
- consider ways to increase school leaders' knowledge of how to review and report Pacific students' achievement and progress, particularly when the numbers are small.

## Introduction

In its education reviews of schools with Pacific students, ERO evaluates how well these students are achieving and what the schools are doing to improve education outcomes for them. By asking what and how well schools are doing, ERO highlights the need for them to develop effective strategies for improving their education of Pacific students.

Critical to success for all students is their presence at school, their engagement and participation in learning, and their success in achieving good educational outcomes. Being at school, and participating in learning that is both tailored and relevant, are precursors for students' achievement and success, whether they are at primary or secondary school.

In 2009, ERO evaluated the progress in Pacific student achievement. In this pilot study in 32 Auckland schools ERO focused on initiatives these schools had undertaken to improve Pacific students' achievement, engagement and presence, and the effect of these since their previous ERO review. ERO found that:

- Pacific students' school attendance was generally not an issue;
- in approximately three quarters of the schools, Pacific student engagement had remained high or had improved since the previous review;
- Pacific students were over-represented in stand-down, suspension and exclusion statistics;
- almost two thirds of schools were successfully engaging Pacific parents and communities as partners in students' learning;
- in half of the schools, Pacific student achievement in literacy and numeracy had improved;
- most schools collected good quality achievement information for Pacific students; and
- over a third of schools were not using achievement information effectively.

ERO made recommendations related to data analysis and use, community partnership, reporting to parents, and teacher professional learning and development.

In this 2010 study, ERO extended the scope of the evaluation and focused on students' presence, achievement and engagement in schools throughout New Zealand. ERO also investigated the initiatives that schools had put in place in the last three years to improve Pacific students' outcomes.

A total of 243 schools were included in this evaluation: 70 secondary and composite schools, and 173 primary schools.

## Background

The Ministry of Education's Annual Report (2009) identified that a disproportionate number of Pacific students were not developing required literacy and numeracy skills in line with their peers.

Both national and international surveys of educational attainment at primary level show that Pacific students overall are achieving at lower levels than their peers. The 2005/06 *Programme for International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)* survey identifies that 16 percent of Pacific students were less likely to reach the lowest reading benchmark. The international median was four percent, and for all New Zealand students it was eight percent. The 2006 *Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)* gave average scores for Pacific (427), Māori (453) and NZ European/Pakeha (510). Researchers, educators and Pacific communities have expressed concern about this underachievement. Since 2001, the Ministry of Education's *Pasifika Education Plans* have highlighted a commitment to reducing disparities and improving the achievement of Pacific students in New Zealand.

Recent National Education Monitoring Projects (NEMP) (2005 to 2007) show that although Pacific students do not perform as well as pākehā students they are more engaged with, and more positive about their own abilities in, mathematics, science, social studies, and science.

Ministry of Education data on Pacific presence, engagement, and achievement at secondary school shows complex relationships between the three factors. While Pacific students are more likely to stay at school longer than Pakeha and Māori, they have a higher absence rate than pākehā and Asian students. The visibility of Pacific adults is low, with Pacific students less likely to be taught by Pacific teachers, or to be at a school with Pacific members on the board of trustees.

In 2007, 56 percent of Pacific school leavers obtained National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) level 2 or higher, compared with 84 percent of Asian, 71 percent of Pākehā and 44 percent of Māori students. Longitudinal research on NCEA and motivation and achievement shows that Pacific students reported more family child-caring responsibilities which correlated with achieving fewer credits in NCEA level 1.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Meyer et al (2009) *Impact of the NCEA and Student Motivation and Achievement Motivation and Achievement at Secondary School - The relationship between NCEA design and student motivation and achievement: A Three-Year Follow-Up*: Luanna H. Meyer, Kirsty F. Weir, John McClure, Frank Walkey, and Lynanne McKenzie [Jessie Heterington Centre for Educational Research and the School of Psychology - Victoria University of Wellington July 2009.

## Strategic links

The *National Administrations Guideline 1* that requires every board through its principal and staff, to:

- provide all students in Years 1 to 10 with opportunities to achieve for success in all areas of the National Curriculum (a i);
- give priority to student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in Years 1 to 8 (a ii);
- through a range of assessment practices, gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable the progress and achievement of students to be evaluated, giving priority first to student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in Years 1 to 8, and then to breadth and depth of learning related to the needs, abilities and interests of students, the nature of the school's curriculum, and the scope of *The National Curriculum* (b i-iv);
- on the basis of good quality assessment information, identify students and groups of students who are not achieving, who are at risk of not achieving, who have special needs (including gifted and talented students), and aspects of the curriculum which require particular attention (c i-iv); and
- develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address the needs of students and aspects of the curriculum identified in (c) above (d).

This evaluation is closely linked to the Ministry of Education's *Pasifika Education Plan 2009-2012* which sets goals and targets for promoting Pacific students' achievement from early childhood through to tertiary education. In the school sector, the goals are: increased Pacific parent involvement in students' education; effective teaching focused on achievement; and Pacific students achieving qualifications. The *Pasifika Education Plan* also has a goal to increase Pacific children's access and participation in early childhood education.

## What ERO wanted to know?

The overarching evaluation question ERO asked in schools was:

*What does the school know about progress in Pacific student achievement since the last ERO review?*

ERO sought answers to this question through six investigative questions about the extent to which there had been improvements in:

- Pacific students' presence at school;
- Pacific students' engagement with learning;
- the board of trustees' knowledge and understanding of Pacific issues;
- the school's engagement with its Pacific community;
- students' achievement in literacy and numeracy from Years 1 to 10; and
- the quality of the school's achievement information for Pacific students.

Information from individual school reviews was aggregated nationally to provide the findings for this report which are grouped under:

- presence;
- engagement; and
- achievement.

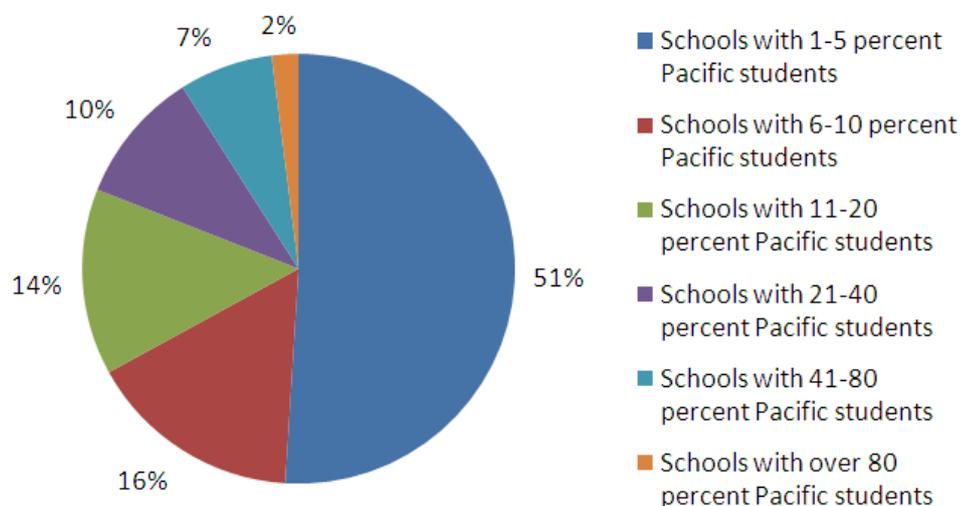
The report includes some comparison between the findings from ERO's 2009 pilot report in Auckland schools and those from the wider 2010 evaluation.

## What the statistics show about the schools

### ***Roll numbers***

Pacific students in the 233 schools made up from 95 percent of the roll to less than one percent. Approximately half the schools had fewer than five percent of the roll students of Pacific ethnicity.

*Figure 1: Percentages of Pacific students on the evaluation schools' roll.*



Samoan students were the largest group, followed by Tongan. Others were Niuean, Fijian,<sup>3</sup> Cook Island Māori, Tokelauan and Tuvaluan. Schools grouped some Pacific ethnicities together and classified them as 'other Pacific'.

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<sup>3</sup> Schools do not distinguish between ethnic Fijian and Fijian Indian.

## **Participation in early childhood education**

In each primary school ERO asked what the school knew about Pacific students' early childhood education (ECE) attendance.

Fourteen percent of the 173 primary schools said that all their Pacific students had attended ECE. In a further 30 percent of schools most Pacific students had participated in ECE, and 18 percent of schools reported that some had. In three schools no Pacific students had attended ECE. There was no information about this in the remaining 32 percent of primary schools.

## **Pacific staffing and representation on the board of trustees**

In almost a fifth of schools the numbers of Pacific staff and trustees had increased. Most other schools had the same number of Pacific staff members as at the time of their previous education review. Sixty-seven percent of schools had no teachers that were Pacific and 83 percent had none in senior management positions. Two percent of schools had more than 10 teachers and more than three senior leaders of Pacific ethnicity.

Seventy-eight percent of schools had the same number of Pacific trustees as at their previous ERO review. The number of Pacific trustees ranged from none to eight. Seventeen percent of schools had more Pacific trustees and five percent had fewer.

## Findings

### Presence

The *Pasifika Education Plan*'s 'compass for success' places high priority on students' presence at school. Presence includes not only attendance and retention, but also the incidence of disciplinary actions such as stand-downs, suspensions, exclusions and expulsions.

ERO found that day-to-day school attendance was not a significant problem for Pacific students in just over 30 percent of schools. Retention levels in secondary schools were also improving. This finding is similar to those in ERO's 2009 pilot evaluation where over a third of schools had few concerns about Pacific presence. Twenty eight percent of schools had improved presence resulting from a range of initiatives.

#### *Attendance initiatives*

One school monitored the new entrants carefully and was flexible about the time children remained in the reception class. This flexibility meant Pacific children did not move into the mainstream classes until they were judged to be ready. They were closely monitored and supported to establish the habit of regular attendance in this class. Evidence showed that Pacific children with no ECE experience made major gains as a result of their time in the reception class.

In another school staff developed a partnership with Group Special Education (GSE) specialists, to work with the parents of Pacific students for whom other forms of contact had been ineffective.

Five mainly low-decile urban schools provided breakfast in a room where students could gather before school. The rationale for this was that students were more likely to come to school and once there, were more likely to be ready to learn if they were well feed.

At some secondary schools, mentoring of Pacific students supported their engagement in school, thereby reinforcing the importance of regular attendance and reducing the likelihood of behaviour incidents that could result in stand-down, suspension or exclusion.

Some schools do not monitor or have strategies in place to improve Pacific students' attendance patterns over time. ERO found that almost 40 percent of schools either had insufficient evidence to make a judgement about Pacific students' presence or had made no improvements since their last ERO review

For some schools, transience<sup>4</sup> had a negative impact on Pacific students' presence. In a few schools leaders attempted to find ways to deal with the effects of transience by focusing on catering for the learning needs of students affected by disrupted schooling.

Overall, schools showed a trend towards more stand-downs and fewer suspensions and exclusions. This suggested that schools recognised the value of earlier intervention to change behaviour. Many showed a reduction in the number of Pacific students involved in disciplinary action, while others reported low numbers or none at all.

Stand-downs and suspensions for Pacific students generally occurred more frequently in secondary than in primary schools. In some schools, Pacific students were not over-represented in suspension and exclusion data. In others a disproportionately high rate of disciplinary action meant absence from school for these students.

Issues related to suspensions, exclusions and expulsion indicated that engaging Pacific students was the fundamental challenge in some schools. Hence, initiatives to keep students in school were usually associated with measures to increase their engagement in learning and in the life of the school.

A mid-sized, decile 3 secondary school with 35percent of the roll Pacific students implemented a wide range of initiatives that significantly reduced the number of stand-downs and suspensions. Pacific staff acted as positive leadership role models for students. A Pacific Pride initiative in the school enabled senior students to undertake leadership and mentoring roles to support other Pacific students. The engagement of Pacific students and their families with school was also encouraged through a teacher support and community liaison initiative.

Most other initiatives undertaken to improve Pacific students' presence at school were generally aimed at improving all three aspects of Pacific education: achievement, engagement and presence as these are seen as interrelated. These initiatives are further discussed later in this report.

They included:

- developing links with parents, families and communities;
- setting targets and monitoring progress towards them;
- integrating Pacific contexts into school programmes;
- fostering Pacific cultural activities and participation;
- setting up homework centres, playgroups and a reception class;
- appointing a liaison person or coordinator for Pacific students; and
- providing for language-learning and use of Pacific languages.

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<sup>4</sup> Students moving frequently from school to school, often with periods of non-attendance in between.

Two secondary schools initiatives had a high impact on Pacific students' presence. One had developed indicators to guide the evaluation and analysis of data. The results of this self review were positive, showing increased attendance, dramatic improvement in engagement of the Pacific community; high participation in the homework centre and increased membership of culture groups. Analysed data supported these conclusions.

The other school had data to show improvement in Pacific student attendance and reduction in stand-downs and suspensions. Although these schools could not make a direct causal connection between particular initiatives and the impact each had, the overall effect on progress in Pacific student achievement was positive.

Few schools had formally evaluated specific initiatives. Most believed that through a combination of measures, Pacific students' presence was maintained at a good level and that issues with individual students and families were dealt with effectively.

## Engagement

'Engagement' is a broad term covering a range of factors that combine to produce conditions where students are motivated to learn and achieve. Indicators of student engagement relate to factors associated with high quality teaching and assessment, students' involvement in their learning, morale, perceptions about school, participation in decision-making, attitudes and behaviour.

To engage diverse groups such as Pacific students, teachers also need to have sufficient background knowledge, skills and awareness to form positive relationships and make meaningful connections between curriculum content and learners' life experiences.

ERO found that Pacific student engagement had remained at a high level or substantially improved in 35 percent of schools or had improved in 31 percent of the schools. In 21 percent of schools engagement had not improved and in the remaining 13 percent of schools there was not enough information kept by the school to make a judgement.

### ***Initiatives to improve Pacific students' engagement***

ERO found a wide variety of strategies introduced to improve students' engagement. Schools mainly focused on developing cultural understandings, relationships, support programmes, transitions strategies and leadership opportunities.

Many schools, particularly in Auckland, participated in local cluster-based professional learning and development as part of Ministry of Education schooling improvement projects. These initiatives reflected the particular ethnic mix and social environment in each community. At the same time, schools that were working towards giving effect to *The New Zealand Curriculum* found that their preparation for this helped in increasing Pacific students' engagement in learning and in the life of the school.

Initiatives to improve classroom practices and student engagement generally involved increasing teachers' knowledge and awareness of Pacific cultures. Some schools referred to the integration of 'Pacific pedagogies' into teaching and learning. Teachers were expected to use Pacific languages (as in greetings), resources and content (integrating aspects of Pacific cultures) in the classrooms and around the school.

In a decile 9 school, eight percent of whose students were of Pacific ethnicity, a focus group had been formed to discuss how the school could promote understanding of Pacific culture in the school. The group included a Pacific teacher, Pacific parents and a Pacific student. The feedback and ideas from this group contributed to school planning and curriculum development. This approach produced a school climate in which Pacific student engagement remained at a high level.

Many schools offered Pacific cultural activities and performing arts. School leaders felt that students were more likely to gain a sense of belonging in a school when prominence was given to Pacific groups. Students experienced success and were able to take on leadership opportunities in the cultural activities.

In a decile 3 secondary school with 26 percent of the roll Pacific, many students from a range of ethnic groups participated in the Polynesian Club organised by senior Pacific students. All junior students took part in a Pasifika Day organised by seniors, with National Qualifications Framework credits available for this leadership role. A Pacific student chaired the college council. Pacific students enjoyed the opportunity to share their culture with other students in the college.

Pacific students in a decile 10 secondary school were also fully engaged in the life of the college, even though they comprised only four percent of the roll. They held leadership positions, including that of head boy, as captains of sports teams and in a range of cultural activities.

Pacific students were similarly well represented in leadership roles in a decile 6 secondary school with 11 percent of the roll Pacific students. The student representative on the board in 2008 was of Pacific ethnicity, and Pacific students were on the student council each year. Pacific students were strongly involved in school sport teams and in music groups in the school, such as choir, band, and the barbershop chorus.

A decile 6 school, where Pacific students comprised 15 percent of the roll, had maintained a high level of Pacific student engagement since their last review. Pacific contexts were evident in the curriculum, school routines and events. Pacific arts, crafts and stories were part of the everyday life of the school. Pacific students had leadership opportunities and were encouraged and supported to be role models for their peers. Relevant professional readings were readily accessible for staff and reading resources in Pacific languages were available for use by teachers, students and parents. Pacific parents were personally invited to school events and activities and were actively involved in.

In some schools the main development focus was on providing additional Pacific teachers and/or teacher aides to support Pacific students and their families. Some boards funded an additional staff member to fulfil a coordination, specialist or liaison role for Pacific students and their families. In these schools pastoral care networks were seen as important contributors to student engagement.

Initiatives to improve student language and communication skills were evident in a few schools. Teachers and leaders in these schools recognised that some of their Pacific students lacked fluency in English and in the language of their families' countries of origin. Programmes included: setting up a student-run radio station that broadcast in Pacific languages as well as English; establishing bilingual units; and employing interpreters.

A few schools were operating playgroups on school property. This brought parents and young children into the school on a regular basis. Schools introducing playschools on their site aimed to help Pacific students and their parents become familiar and comfortable with the school environment, its people and its systems. They also wanted the children to socialise and learn with other children before starting school.

Homework centres or classes were in place in five schools, four of which were secondary schools. These were staffed by teacher aides and/or teachers, who supported and encouraged students with their learning.

Some schools invited high achievers from Pacific communities to speak to students. The fields these role models had gained recognition in and the experiences they shared with students showed possibilities and pathways to which Pacific students could aspire to.

### **Effectiveness of student engagement initiatives**

Many schools did not know what impact their initiatives had on Pacific student engagement. Others reported in general terms about improved teaching, student engagement and achievement outcomes. In ERO's 2009 report, ERO also found that most schools had only generalised or anecdotal evidence about the impact of their initiatives to improve student engagement.

In a few schools teachers and leaders provided specific data as evidence of engagement. This data was collected and analysed showing either:

- improved retention of Pacific students to Year 13;
- Pacific students reporting through school surveys increased satisfaction and enjoyment from being at school, determined;
- Pacific student achievement targets being raised every year; and/or
- increased popularity of Pacific language course options.

## ***Initiatives to improve board of trustees' understanding of Pacific issues in education***

Schools that are focused on increasing Pacific students' achievement need board members that are interested in these students and know about their engagement, progress and achievement. They need to understand the actions being taken to improve outcomes for this group, and information to help them monitor progress towards achieving charter targets. Board members with awareness and understanding of the particular influences on Pacific students' progress at school can make informed decisions about funding resources and teacher professional learning and development to contribute to progress.

ERO evaluated how well informed board members were about issues for Pacific students. Since each school's previous ERO's review, board members' knowledge and understanding had remained at a high level in 10 percent of the schools and had substantially improved in 9 percent. A further 32 percent had improved or somewhat improved. In most of the substantially improved schools action had been taken to raise and maintain board members' awareness of issues affecting Pacific students' achievement. It was also used to help them set strategic goals for improving these students engagement in learning.

Seventeen percent of the schools had more Pacific board members than at the time of their school's previous ERO review. Some school leaders adopted a proactive approach to recruiting Pacific trustees. In many of these schools Pacific communities had started to see the value of having a voice in school governance.

Many board members had participated in Ministry of Education professional learning and development workshops on the *Pasifika Education Plan*. Where schools were involved in activities with a cluster of neighbouring schools, board members often attended relevant sessions. Some also attended Pacific fono<sup>5</sup> linked to the plan and its implementation.

ERO found that of the 12 highest performing schools in this evaluation<sup>6</sup>, eight had one or more Pacific representatives on the board. Meanwhile, of the 14 schools that were least effective in providing for Pacific students, only one had Pacific representation on the board. It seems likely that Pacific trustees have a positive influence on governance and management decisions concerning Pacific students.

Effective school leaders recognised the need to increase board members' knowledge and understanding of Pacific students' education needs. They reported regularly and fully, so that board members received information that showed how well Pacific students were achieving. These trustees were in a good position to set appropriate strategic goals and targets and make appropriate resourcing decisions.

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<sup>5</sup> Gathering, meeting (Samoan).

<sup>6</sup> For each school, ERO's judgements on 13 aspects of progress in Pacific student achievement were given a number value and aggregated, and a high performing group of 12 schools was identified.

## **Effectiveness of board engagement initiatives**

In schools where steps had been taken to increase trustees' knowledge and understanding of Pacific student engagement and learning, many boards demonstrated effective governance practices aimed at improving outcomes for these students. Strong community and school links enabled parent and community views to contribute to board planning. Trustees used achievement information to assist with developing and reviewing annual charter targets. Boards allocated appropriate funds for staffing and contextual teaching and learning materials to support the development of initiatives aimed at improving Pacific student achievement.

## ***Initiatives to improve schools' engagement with Pacific communities***

A further factor that contributes to student engagement is the extent to which parents and communities are involved in the life of the school and in their children's learning.

ERO found that almost 30 percent of schools in this evaluation had sustained a high level of engagement with their Pacific community or had substantially improved their engagement. Thirty eight percent of schools could not provide evidence of improved engagement with their Pacific community. The remainder of the schools had somewhat improved their engagement with their Pacific community.

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

Links between schools and Pacific parents, families and communities were established through fono, home visits, newsletters in Pacific languages, personal invitations to school events, and opportunities to play an active role in activities such as bilingual programmes, sport and performing arts.

Schools that placed priority on partnership with parents and families developed strategies to create and maintain links to the community. Effective links enabled schools to find out about Pacific communities' aspirations and values. The relationship also encouraged schools and parents to share information about how to help each student learn, and fostered family involvement and participation in school activities.

A few schools had Pacific parent groups for consultation, communicating and involving parents in school activities.

In one school a Tongan PTA (Parent Teachers' Association) had been formed, with a focus on supporting student learning at home.

In another school, a Samoan parents' association met regularly, received formal reports on matters concerning Pacific students, and contributed to decision making about Pacific programmes. Close liaison was maintained with families through a range of activities such as a Pacific family day, Pacific NCEA nights and a fiafia<sup>7</sup> night for leavers.

A Pasifika Parents' Support Group in one school met regularly to organise events. Achievers' Evenings were attended by parents, students and many staff to facilitate discussion on aspects of learning and student engagement.

### **Effectiveness of community engagement initiatives**

Schools that initiated strategies to improve parent and community engagement generally reported good results. Closer links encouraged regular and meaningful sharing of ideas. Partnership with the community brought opportunities for both teachers and parents to increase mutual understanding of how to support Pacific students' engagement in learning. Effective initiatives made parents more confident about coming in to their local school, talking with staff and contributing to learning activities.

A decile 2 primary school with a 23 percent Pacific roll reported that more parents were involved in the school on a daily basis, helping with road patrols, breakfast club and cultural groups. Pacific parents and families also attended fono and school meetings in greater numbers than previously.

In another school, family attendance at school meetings increased from less than 16 percent to over 66 percent as a result of new strategies to engage with the Pacific community.

In a decile 1 primary school, with a 66 percent Pacific roll Pacific families had many opportunities to be part of school activities. They were regularly encouraged to talk about their aspirations for their children. The community requested Niuean teachers, and the board subsequently employed two. Families sought recapitation so their children could remain at the school for Years 7 and 8. Trustees surveyed all families' opinions and got responses from all but one.

School leaders were responsive to ideas and suggestions arising from consultation. Other changes reflecting parents' wishes included introducing a school uniform, free swimming lessons, specialist music teaching and provision for e-learning. The community strongly supported the way the school was managed and governed.

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<sup>7</sup> Celebration or get-together.

## Achievement

Improved literacy and numeracy achievement is the first goal for the compulsory schooling sector in the *Pasifika Education Plan*. ERO evaluated the quality of the school's Pacific student achievement information and the extent to which the literacy and numeracy of Pacific students had improved since their previous ERO review.

ERO found that 58 percent of schools collected good quality assessment information (about all students including Pacific) and used this to identify students that needed support, and for some school-wide decision making. However, many leaders had not designed or implemented processes to extract information about groups of Pacific students from their school-wide data.

Well over half of the schools did not know whether the literacy and numeracy achievement of Pacific students as a group had improved since their previous ERO review. Fewer than 20 percent of schools were able to show that their Pacific students' literacy and numeracy achievement had improved since then. Within the 20 percent of schools seventeen percent had improved literacy achievement and 15 percent had improved numeracy achievement levels.

The 2009 ERO pilot report identified that the overall quality of Pacific achievement information collected was good in most schools, and high in five of the schools in the Auckland sample. However, a quarter of the schools did not have sufficient reliable data to inform their planning and teaching decisions for Pacific students. Just under half had set targets focused on improving Pacific students' progress and achievement.

The results from ERO's 2009 Pilot and this evaluation differ significantly. Firstly, in 27 percent of the pilot study schools Pacific students comprised more than half of the roll. In eight of these schools Pacific students made up more than two-thirds of the roll.

In this wider evaluation in just over half of the schools Pacific students made up between one and five percent of the roll. Many leaders in these schools identified issues with students' privacy when attempting to report such a small data set to the board. Some of these leaders also felt it was not always useful to combine all students from the diverse Pacific nations and cultures into one group for data analysis, programme planning and future decision making.

In order to advance the progress of Pacific students, and evaluate the impact of initiatives in place for them, it is essential that schools know about their achievement. Given that PIRLS, PISA and NEMP data show that Pacific students are over represented in the lowest achievement levels it is particularly important that leaders and boards develop processes to review and take action on the achievement of these students'.

One school with a small percentage of Pacific students had a register to track achievement and progress. The register included a profile on each student, with information families had provided, assessment results, diagnostic information, identified strengths and next development needs, special abilities, and strategies to support ongoing academic and social development. School leaders were aware of the progress and needs of the small group of Pacific students.

In other schools where more than five percent of the roll were Pacific students, other factors contributed to a lack of information about how well these students had progressed since the last ERO review. Some schools that collected useful data had introduced new assessment processes since the last ERO review and therefore did not have baseline data with which to make comparisons over time. Others had collated good information but had not analysed or interpreted this data to make decisions about previous programmes or future decisions. A few schools did not collate enough literacy and/or numeracy data to extract information about Pacific students.

### ***Initiatives implemented to improve Pacific students achievement in literacy and numeracy***

Most schools were involved in school-wide initiatives to improve all students' literacy and numeracy achievement. These included parent reading and mathematics programmes, academic counselling, homework centres, reception classes (for new entrants), Duffy 'Books in Homes', a readers' club, a summer reading contract and teachers engaged in action research.

Many leaders said that school-wide initiatives were addressing Pacific students' literacy and numeracy needs. Some had evidence that these students had improved at the same rate as other students. Although the intervention could be seen as successful for many students, Pacific students often remained at the lower levels compared to other groups of their peers. These schools did not do anything to accelerate the progress of the Pacific students in those lowest levels.

Initiatives developed specifically for Pacific students generally included elements of Pacific cultures and languages, and often sought to increase parents' involvement in students' learning. Many leaders felt that increasing the emphasis Pacific culture and languages would result in improved achievement in literacy and numeracy for Pacific students. In these schools less emphasis was placed on developing and implementing high quality teaching practices that could accelerate literacy and numeracy progress and achievement

In a few schools ERO found professional learning and development approaches that did challenge teachers' ideas and expectations about achievement.

This type of professional learning and development initiative was identified in a decile 2 primary school where Pacific students made up 35 percent of the roll. At the end of 2008, this school aimed to improve the early literacy of Pacific students in their first year at school. One of the school leaders was released to:

- analyse and share assessment data for students in their first year of school;
- observe and review the quality of teaching of teachers in the Years 1 and 2 classes;
- model effective teaching practices in reading and writing;
- provide ongoing critique of teaching practices used to raise reading and writing achievement of students in their first and second year; and
- adopt a mentoring approach to improving teacher effectiveness.

After identifying improved achievement for these students, the school's leader identified the next step was for the project leader to follow the same approach with teachers in the middle and senior school.

One secondary school established a centre specifically designated as a place of learning and support for Pacific students. This was run in conjunction with an academic mentoring programme for Year 13 Pacific students.

Several secondary schools had extra English classes or Pacific literacy programmes as an alternative to learning other languages in Years 9 and 10. Teachers of these classes used students' Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) information to guide planning, and their teaching targeted learning gaps that had been identified through the diagnostic testing.

Many schools catered for Pacific students whose English fluency needed to develop. This usually entailed employing a full-time or part-time specialist teacher, or a teacher aide. Twenty one percent of schools had at least one teacher aide of Pacific ethnicity. English as a second or other language (ESOL) programmes included:

- early assessment of students' literacy and numeracy achievement and learning needs;
- the development of individual learning plans to cater for students' identified needs;
- orientation activities to help students transition into the school;
- the implementation of language acquisition strategies both in class and out of class;
- opportunities for students to discuss developing friendships and widening their involvement in other school activities;
- encouragement and support for students' participation in co-curricular activities;
- close liaison and partnership with parents and communities; and
- reporting to the board about students' involvement in the ESOL programme.

### *Inclusion of first languages*

A variety of initiatives involved the use of students' first languages in school. The rationale for this practice was that fluency in one language was essential for developing fluency in another. Initiatives ERO observed included:

- establishing a Samoan bilingual unit;
- sending out a newsletter in Samoan for parents of students in the bilingual unit;
- developing literacy assessment tools in Samoan;
- collating a list of frequency used Samoan words to develop students' vocabulary;
- promoting students' oral fluency through broadcasting in Samoan on a school radio station;
- providing Samoan as a second language in one class;
- offering Samoan as a language option for Years 7 and 8 students; and
- introducing Pacific languages at Year 9.

### ***Effectiveness of initiatives to improve literacy and numeracy***

Many schools neither monitored nor analysed progress for different ethnic groups. As a result the effectiveness of school-wide programmes to improve outcomes for Pacific students could not be evaluated. The lack of reliable systems and methods to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives in these schools meant that resources may not have been directed where they could have the most impact on raising student achievement.

In most cases schools provided informal or anecdotal evidence about the success of initiatives that specifically aimed to improve Pacific students' achievement in literacy and numeracy. In some schools, observed changes in teaching practice were seen as evidence of initiatives' effectiveness. However, these schools lacked assessment information that could highlight actual improvement for Pacific students.

Schools that were involved in school-wide professional learning and development projects had often collated baseline data to measure student achievement in literacy and numeracy. They were therefore able to monitor the progress of individual students, cohorts and groups including Pacific students.

A few schools had data to show that Pacific student literacy and/or numeracy had improved over time through a range of initiatives. They could not formally attribute improvement to a particular intervention. However the fact that students had improved their achievement was important and could be investigated further to contribute to ongoing future developments.

Schools with strategic or annual targets for Pacific student achievement reported against these and used the data to evaluate the impact of initiatives. A good example of robust review of initiatives was in a secondary school whose close monitoring over time showed increased numbers of Pacific students achieving Level 2 NCEA. This improvement was attributed to the literacy and numeracy initiatives targeting Pacific students in Years 9 and 10 introduced over that period.

## ***What was happening in the schools where Pacific students' achievement had improved substantially?***

The following sections focus on what was happening in 12 schools had made the most difference for Pacific students.

Analysis of the statistical information showed that although the 12 schools were all urban they varied considerably in other aspects.

- Four of the schools were secondary and 8 are primary schools.
- Six were in Auckland, four in the central region and two in the South Island.
- Deciles ranged from 1 (4 schools) to 8 (one school).
- Half of the schools were decile 1 to 3, where the percentage of Pacific students ranged from 26 to 72 percent.
- Four schools had Pacific rolls of fewer than 10 percent, with one having one percent.
- Four schools had Pacific teachers and three had senior leaders of Pacific ethnicity. Seven had neither.
- Eight had Pacific trustees on the board.

The statistics by themselves did not point to particular factors that distinguished the most effective schools. The approaches, practices and strategies adopted in these schools brought about improved achievement for Pacific students. The most commonly reoccurring factors that contributed to their success were effective self review, an inclusive and positive school culture, and valuing home-school partnerships.

### **Systematic self review**

Robust self review contributed to the good practice found in these 12 schools. Leaders and teachers collected, collated and analysed achievement information for groups including Pacific students, even when the roll numbers or percentages were low. Five of the schools had a Pacific roll of 10 percent or less, and three had fewer than 10 students. The schools with the small Pacific rolls carefully managed their monitoring to ensure they were well informed about these learners' achievement. To avoid identifying individual students, reports to the board used general statements about students' progress and achievement compared to national norms, without referring to year levels.

Boards set annual charter targets using their knowledge of how well Pacific students were achieving. Leaders and teachers planned and introduced interventions and programmes specifically targeted to Pacific students. These were evaluated by comparing achievement data over time, using surveys and considering informal anecdotal evidence. Trustees, leader and teachers expected improvement and high achievement and put appropriate measures in place to track progress towards reaching their targets.

## **Creating an inclusive climate**

School leaders created and maintained learning environments which recognised and valued diverse groups of students. Leaders set high expectations of staff and students. Appropriate professional learning and development supported teachers' to implement effective practices in the classroom, and appraisal goals reflected school priorities.

School events and teaching reflected elements of Pacific languages and cultures. Students had opportunities to take part in cultural activities relevant to their families' history. Such activities were regarded as an integral part of the schools' own culture, and not as an 'add-on.' Pacific students had a sense of belonging and pride, and were happy at school. The school climate supported their engagement, learning and progress.

## **Maintaining partnership with parents and communities**

School personnel recognised the value of close, collaborative relationships with parents, families and communities. They encouraged Pacific families to stand for representation on the boards. Schools established links, networks and channels of communication in Pacific communities.

Parents were confident about coming into the schools and asking questions. They learned more about how to help their children at home and could contribute to planning and decision making as well as to activities in the schools. Effective home-school partnership resulted in high levels of student and community engagement.

## **Conclusions**

Improvements in Pacific students' presence, engagement and achievement, since their previous review, were evident in a small number of schools. Fewer students were involved in suspensions or disciplinary actions and attendance was not an issue in nearly a third of schools. Twenty percent of schools had evidence of improved literacy and numeracy achievement for Pacific students since their last ERO review. More schools had Pacific representation on the board and an increased awareness of Pacific students' issues and successes.

Many schools put in place initiatives to improve outcomes for Pacific students. However, in most cases they had no process for identifying how or whether these actions improved Pacific students' presence or achievement. In most cases only informal or anecdotal evidence was used to find out about the impacts of the strategies implemented. To reduce the achievement disparities identified in national and international surveys, assessment information should be used as part of schools' review and development of strategies to make improvements for Pacific students.

In some schools with small numbers of Pacific students, school leaders identified difficulties monitoring, collating and reporting achievement and attendance results to the board. These leaders were concerned that privacy issues may arise if individual students results were identified. In some of the most effective schools leaders had thoroughly monitored these students progress and reported results to the board in very general terms to assist decision making.

The integration of cultural elements is often believed by school leaders to be a logical step in improving Pacific students' achievement. Many schools' initiatives were based on this assumption. However, some schools' initiatives focused solely on culture and language development without giving regard to improving or changing teaching practices. Schools that succeeded in raising Pacific student achievement generally used more than one approach to improve teaching and increase their partnerships with parents.

In the most effective schools, commonly reoccurring success factors were effective self review, an inclusive and positive school culture, and valuing home-school partnerships. Collated and analysed achievement information for groups of Pacific students contributed to robust self review and development of programmes planned to improve achievement for these students. High expectations were evident for both staff and students, and relevant professional learning and development supported teachers' implementation of effective practices in the classroom. Parents' role in their child's learning was valued and promoted. Work is still needed to enable all Pacific students to benefit from such positive actions.

## Recommendations

ERO recommends that school leaders:

- improve how they collect, analyse and use Pacific students' achievement information;
- improve school processes to enable students to know about their progress and achievement and how to manage their learning;
- build teachers' and boards' knowledge of the strengths and needs of Pacific students, and how to use this knowledge to benefit these students;
- strengthen links with Pacific parents and communities to facilitate communication and build mutual understanding about the best ways to support their children's learning; and
- use the contextual flexibility inherent in *The New Zealand Curriculum* to design and implement teaching and learning programmes that reflect Pacific students' voices and aspects of cultures and languages relevant to their learning.

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education:

- work with schools to increase school leaders' and teachers' understanding of the importance of partnership with Pacific communities; and
- consider ways to increase school leaders' knowledge of how to review and report Pacific students' achievement and progress, particularly when the numbers are small.

## Appendix 1: Methodology

Data collection took place as part of scheduled education reviews.

The project's overarching evaluation question asked:  
What does the school know about Pacific student achievement since the last ERO review?

The six key evaluation questions supported this:

Since the last ERO review -

- to what extent has Pacific student presence improved?
- to what extent has Pacific student engagement improved?
- to what extent has the board of trustees' knowledge and understanding of Pacific issues improved?
- to what extent has the school's engagement with its Pacific community improved?
- to what extent has student achievement in literacy and numeracy improved?
- to what extent has the quality of achievement information improved?

Evidence was triangulated through discussions and interviews with a range of school personnel, as well as from observations and relevant documentation.

Based on evidence gathered, reviewers formed overall judgements about the progress made in each of these six areas. They also identified and reported examples of good practice.

Analysis included the identification of a group of high performing schools and a group of schools that were least effective in their provision of Pacific students. ERO's judgements on aspects of the six areas were assigned a numeric value (highest quality level given highest number) and these numbers were added together to give an overall total score. With a possible grade aggregate of 63, 12 schools that scored 50 or more were identified as the most effective, and qualitative data on these schools was examined to develop broader judgements about effective practice.

Schools whose aggregate was 14 or less were identified as the least effective.

Evaluation Services evaluators collated and analysed reviewers' synthesis sheets to identify and report on national trends and patterns.

## Appendix 2: Statistics of schools in the sample for this report

*Table 1: School types*

School type	Number	% of sample	National %
Full primary (Y1-8)	64	26	44
Contributing (Y1-6)	92	38	31
Intermediate (Y7-8)	13	5	5
Special School	4	2	2
Secondary (Y7-15)	12	5	4
Composite (Y1-15)	5	2	5
Secondary (Y9-15)	53	22	9
Total	243	100	100

The sample of schools in this evaluation differed significantly from national percentages for full primary and Y9-15 secondary schools. Full primary schools were under-represented and Y9-15 schools were over-represented. Other types of schools were similar to national percentages.

*Table 2: School locality*

Locality	Number	% of sample	National %
Urban	231	95	71
Rural	12	5	29
Total	243	100	100

Urban schools were significantly over-represented in the sample of schools in this evaluation.

*Table 3: School decile ranges*

Decile <sup>8</sup>	Number	% of sample	National %
Low decile (1-3)	79	33	31
Middle decile (4-7)	98	40	39
High decile (8-10)	66	27	30
Total	243	100	100

*The sample of schools in this evaluation was similar to the national percentages of schools in each decile range.*

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<sup>8</sup> A school's decile indicates the extent to which a school draws its students from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the lowest proportion of these students.

*Table 4: School roll size group*

Roll size	Number	% of sample	National %
Small (0-150 primary, 0-300 secondary)	46	19	45
Medium (151-300 primary, 301-700 secondary)	67	28	26
Large (301+ primary, 701+ secondary)	130	53	29
Total	243	100	100

The sample of schools in this evaluation included significantly fewer small schools and, significantly more large schools than the national percentages.