



Working with National Standards to Promote Students' Progress and Achievement →

June 2012

Foreword

The whakataukī of the Education Review Office (ERO) demonstrates the importance we place on the educational achievement of our children and young people:

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

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

This report is part of a series ERO is publishing over three years about National Standards. A consistent theme in all the reports to date is the need for strong professional leadership to effectively implement and work with the standards. Effective leadership provides an environment in which school staff, trustees and students can understand and use the National Standards.

Successful 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 task.



Graham Stoop
Chief Review Officer
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Overview

This report is part of a series published by the Education Review Office, over three years, about the implementation of the National Standards in English-medium schools with students in Years 1 to 8.

The New Zealand Curriculum provides schools with direction and a framework to design and review their curriculum to respond to students' diverse learning capabilities and needs. The National Standards help teachers make judgements as to whether students' competence in reading, writing and mathematics is enabling their learning across the curriculum, and whether they are making the expected progress.

In 2011, ERO's focus shifted from evaluating schools' preparedness to work with the National Standards, to evaluating the extent to which they were working with the standards. Schools were required to include in their charters targets to raise student achievement in relation to the National Standards, and to have reported twice to parents and whānau about their child's progress and achievement in relation to the standards in 2010.

Twenty-two percent (97) of the 439 schools included in this evaluation were working well with the National Standards. Fifty-nine percent (258 schools) were developing their systems and processes to work with the standards and 19 percent (84 schools) were not working with all the requirements associated with implementing the standards.

Highly professional leadership was a feature of the 97 schools that were working well with the standards. Leaders were:

- positive in their approach and committed to working with the standards as an integral part of their curriculum review and development processes
- knowledgeable about the standards and making good use of the Ministry of Education's (the Ministry) website and their professional networks to support their understanding and practice
- guiding and supporting teachers as they embedded the standards in their school's assessment practices
- instrumental in planning for, leading and accessing relevant and timely professional learning and development (PLD) that helped build teacher confidence and capability in working with the standards.

Fifty-nine percent of schools (258 schools) were developing processes to work with all the requirements of the National Standards. Within this group, ERO identified a wide range of practice. Some schools were just starting to consider the standards as part of a review of their curriculum and assessment processes. Others were quite well advanced in their development and were refining their assessment and reporting processes. Many of these schools were building teacher confidence in making overall teacher judgements (OTJs) and associated moderation activities.

Nineteen percent of schools (84 schools) were not working with all the requirements of the National Standards. Thirty of these schools were not doing so because they were opposed to the standards. Key issues for the remaining schools included leaders' and/or teachers' limited assessment capability to work with the standards, and a lack of understanding by school

leaders of the nature and intent of the standards. The extent and nature of support these schools needed varied. Some had multiple issues to address and others needed relevant, focused and sustained PLD to build leader and teacher capability to work with all requirements associated with implementing the standards. Working with other schools and learning from them could help some of these schools move forward.

This evaluation highlights the critical role of school leaders in working with the National Standards to raise the achievement of all learners. Effective professional leadership was pivotal to:

- trustees having access to timely and well-analysed school-level achievement information to set targets and make sound resourcing decisions
- teachers developing confidence to make OTJs and engage in moderation discussions
- teachers knowing about and responding to school targets for identified groups of students
- the development of clear expectations and guidance for teachers to enable them to use data to inform and evaluate their teaching; to fully involve students in understanding and assessing their learning; and to establish and maintain partnerships with parents and whānau.

In schools where professional leadership was lacking, trustees were less likely to have a good understanding of the intent of the National Standards, as benchmarks for students' progress and their value for informing governance decisions. Trustees were also less likely to be able to effectively communicate this intent effectively to parents and whānau. Teachers often did not have adequate understanding of the use of the various assessment tools to make and moderate judgements about learners' achievement and progress. Some teachers also needed guidance from school leaders to better understand their role in responding to their school's targets, and how they could support learners to meet or exceed the National Standards.

Next steps

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education continues to provide support for:

- boards of trustees to help them fully understand their role and responsibilities related to the requirements of the National Administration Guidelines and the National Standards, in particular how the standards can assist them to set targets to raise achievement for all students
- school leaders to help them understand the intent of the National Standards and what this means for their role in working with trustees, teachers and parents.

ERO recommends that school leaders support teachers to work with the National Standards by:

- setting clear expectations about and increasing their opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to make overall teaching judgements (OTJs) and engage in moderation discussions
- making them aware of the school's targets related to the National Standards and ensure they understand best practice strategies to respond to the targets in their teaching.

ERO recommends that teachers:

- increase learners' involvement in monitoring their progress towards meeting or exceeding the National Standards and identifying their next steps for learning
- engage in meaningful conversations with students about how they can progress and achieve at or above the National Standards.

Introduction

This report is part of a series ERO is publishing over three years about the implementation of National Standards in English-medium schools, with students in Years 1 to 8. Reports to date are:

- Working with the National Standards within The New Zealand Curriculum, August 2010
- Working with the National Standards: ERO's interim findings for Term 3, 2010, November 2010
- Working with the National Standards: Raising Student Achievement in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, March 2011.

The National Standards came into effect in 2010 for English-medium schools with Years 1 to 8 students. The standards sit within *The New Zealand Curriculum* and are descriptions or signposts of what learners in Years 1 to 8 should know and be able to do in reading, writing and mathematics at different points in their schooling. The standards describe the knowledge, skills and understanding needed to fully access and meet the demands of *The New Zealand Curriculum* across all learning areas. Information about student achievement related to the standards will help schools and the Ministry target assistance to priority learners and raise achievement for all students.

In this evaluation, ERO investigated the extent to which:

- trustees were working with the National Standards in their governance role
- school leaders and teachers were working with the National Standards as part of the school's curriculum and assessment processes
- the school was working with the National Standards to raise student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics.

Schools were expected to set targets in their 2011 charters that would enable them to outline in their 2012 annual report:¹

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

ERO was particularly interested in the information boards of trustees were receiving about students' progress and achievement related to the National Standards, how this information was being used to set targets and how teachers were responding to these targets in their teaching.

Data was gathered for this evaluation in Terms 1, 2 and 3, 2011. The Ministry of Education's timelines for setting and submitting targets meant schools that ERO reviewed early in 2011 were not expected to have finalised or submitted their targets. ERO took account of this in its reviews. By the end of the data collection period for this evaluation, all schools were expected to have submitted their targets related to the National Standards to the Ministry.

¹National Administration Guideline 2A (c).

The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) require schools to report to parents about their child's progress and achievement related to the National Standards. From February 2010, schools have been required to report to parents in writing, in plain language, and at least twice a year, about how their child is progressing and achieving in relation to the reading, writing, and mathematics standards. The mid-year report is expected to focus on progress towards meeting the standards, with the end-of-year report focused on the summary of individual student's progress and achievement against the standards. ERO investigated whether schools had provided parents and whānau with two plain language reports in 2010 about their child's progress and achievement against the National Standards.

Methodology

This evaluation involved 439 schools where ERO carried out an education review in Terms 1, 2 and 3, 2011. The types of schools, and their roll size, locality (urban or rural) and decile group are in Appendix 1.

ERO gathered data for this evaluation in the context of the major evaluation question for education reviews in 2011:²

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

The questions used in this evaluation are in Appendix 2.

All data was collected by ERO review officers in the normal review activities. ERO's *Framework for School Reviews* sets out the process for education reviews.³

Criteria were developed to guide review officers in making judgements about the extent to which trustees, school leaders and teachers were working with the National Standards in their respective roles. The criteria are set out in Appendix 3.

² See: <http://www.ero.govt.nz/Review-Process/For-Schools-and-Kura-Kaupapa-Maori>

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

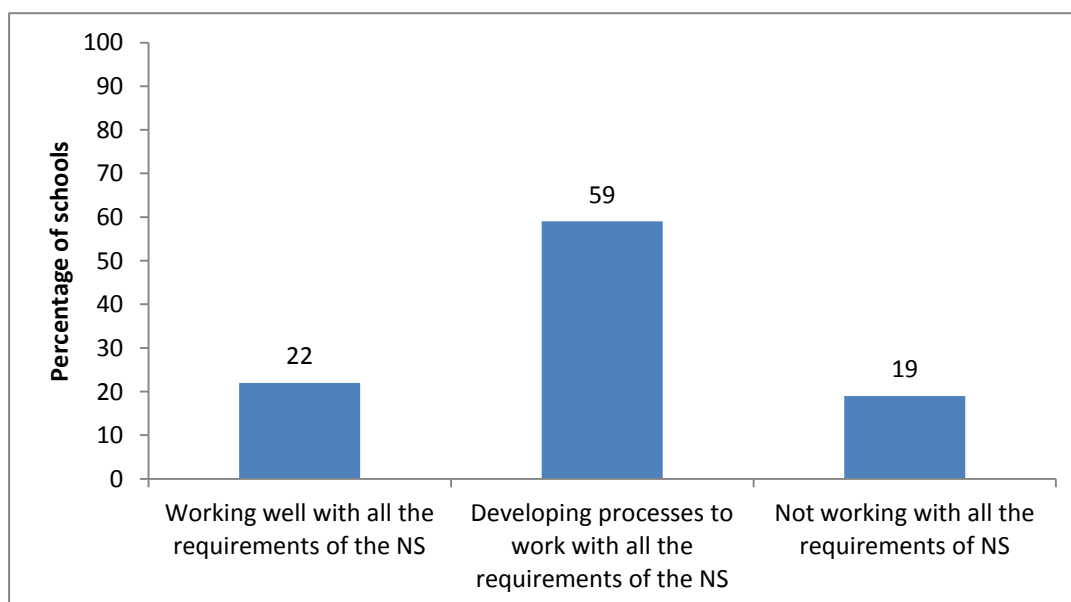
Findings

Working with the National Standards: schools

In 2011, ERO's focus shifted from evaluating preparedness to work with the National Standards to evaluating the extent to which schools were working with them.

Figure 1 shows that 22 percent of the 439 schools were working well with the standards and 59 percent were developing their systems and processes to work with all the requirements of the National Standards. Nineteen percent were not working with all the requirements associated with implementing the standards.

Figure 1: Schools working with the National Standards



What does working well with the National Standards involve?

In the 22 percent of schools that were working well with the National Standards, trustees, leaders and teachers were using them in their respective roles and responsibilities. As discussed in previous ERO reports, a consistent feature of these schools was the positive approach and commitment of leaders to working with the National Standards as an integral part of their curriculum. Leaders were knowledgeable about the standards and used the Ministry's website and their professional networks to support their understanding and practice. They developed and implemented plans to guide and support teachers to embed the National Standards in their school's assessment practices.

Leaders were proactive in their approach, building on existing practice and ensuring staff were well supported to work with the standards. They spent time discussing achievement data, often including teachers in this process. Strategies to target teaching practice were developed collaboratively, and regular discussions in teams or at staff meetings enabled leaders to monitor the impact of strategies for specific students.

School leaders planned for, led and accessed relevant and timely PLD that helped build teacher confidence and capability in working with the standards. PLD was most often

focused on helping teachers use a range of assessment tools and other sources of evidence to make and moderate judgements about students' progress and achievement against the standards.

This report highlights the positive impact of the standards on schools' curriculum and assessment processes. In schools that were working well with the National Standards:

- the standards were considered part of their curriculum design and review process
- leaders and teachers were involved in ongoing review of assessment practices
- targets and associated action plans were often developed collaboratively
- teachers were discussing what the standards meant for learners and adapting existing practice to involve them in assessing and monitoring their progress against the standards
- parents and whānau were well informed about the National Standards through newsletters and meetings
- an increasing focus on teaching as inquiry included regular scrutiny of achievement data to inform decisions about teaching strategies
- leaders and teachers were developing a common language and understanding of the standards.

How were schools developing processes to work with the National Standards?

Fifty-nine percent of schools (258 schools) were developing processes to work with the National Standards. Within this group, ERO identified a wide range of practice in terms of what such development involved. Some were starting to consider the standards as part of a review of their curriculum and assessment processes. Other schools were quite well advanced in their development and were refining their assessment processes. These schools were building teacher confidence in making OTJs and associated moderation activities.

Issues and challenges for many of these schools related to improving their assessment processes and usefulness of their achievement information. This included strengthening leaders' capability to help teachers understand and 'get inside' the standards. In some schools, teachers did not have access to relevant PLD opportunities or clear expectations and guidance about the assessment tools to use, how to make OTJs and associated moderation processes.

More detailed findings about these schools are included later in this report, particularly in relation to target setting, improving the quality of achievement data, reporting to parents and whānau, responding to targets, and involving students in their learning.

What were the issues and challenges for schools that were not working with all the requirements of the National Standards?

Nineteen percent (84 schools) were not working with all requirements of the National Standards. Of these schools:

- 30 were opposed to working with the standards
- 27 did not have leaders and/or teachers with the assessment capability to work with the standards
- 11 had significant leadership issues
- eight were slow to get underway with or had delayed implementing the standards

- five had a new principal
- one school had many beginning teachers
- one school was confused about the use of the National Standards in the bilingual unit
- one school was referring to the National Standards as their school's standards eg "ABC School Standards".

In most of these schools, boards had not received any student achievement information related to the National Standards. Some boards were getting achievement information but it was not based on the standards. In a few schools, trustees had received some information about the standards but only in relation to one aspect (eg, reading) or only for some year levels.

Nearly half these schools had set targets, at the time of the review, but these were not in relation to the National Standards.

Other challenges for these schools included:

- understanding the intent and terminology of the standards
- setting clear and measurable targets
- maintaining stable staffing
- accessing relevant and useful PLD, particularly for trustees
- developing processes to gather relevant and useful achievement data
- increasing teachers' confidence in using multiple sources of evidence to make OTJs
- shifting negative attitudes towards the standards
- school structures, for example in a composite school⁴ where two departments (Years 1-6 and Years 7-15) were operating separately
- developing systems to report to parents after 1, 2 and 3 years at school.

The extent and nature of support these schools needed varied. Some had multiple issues to be addressed. These schools needed relevant, focused and sustained PLD to build both leader and teacher capability to work with all requirements associated with implementing the standards. Working with other schools and learning from them, could help some of these schools move forward.

Trustees needed help to understand the intent of the standards in raising student achievement and communicate this to parents and whānau. Teachers needed to improve their use of various assessment tools and their confidence with analysing and moderating student achievement data. Some also needed to better understand the intent of the National Standards and their role in using data to respond to and accelerate the progress of learners.

In schools that were resisting or opposed to working with the requirements of the National Standards, additional support was not always going to make a difference.

⁴ Schools with students in Years 1 to 15.

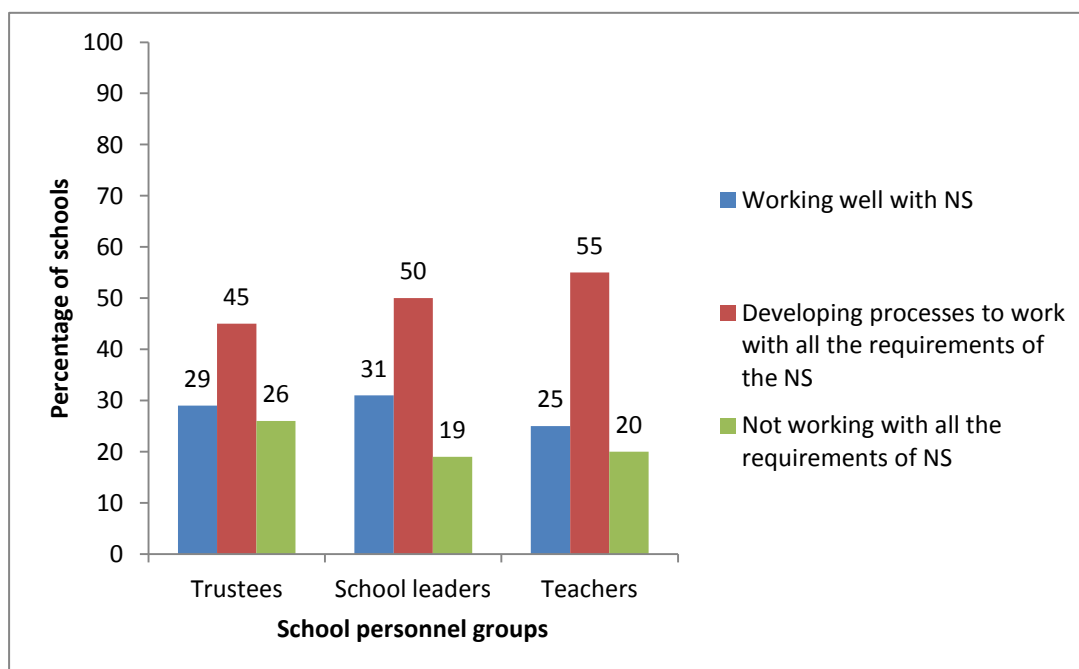
It is of concern that nearly half (13 schools) of the 30 schools opposed to working with the National Standards were low decile (1-3) schools. ERO's education review reports for these 13 schools highlighted the need for an increased focus on groups of learners who are not achieving to expected levels as referenced in the standards.

The intent of the National Standards is to enable schools to use achievement information to identify learners who are not making expected progress and accelerate their progress. It is disappointing that there were 84 schools in which leaders and teachers were not successfully using the standards to ascertain how well students were achieving in reading, writing and mathematics. Parents who have children attending these schools do not know how their child is achieving in relation to others of a similar age.

Working with the National Standards: trustees, school leaders and teachers

ERO investigated the extent to which trustees, school leaders and teachers were working with the National Standards in their respective roles.⁵ This is a changed emphasis from previous reports when ERO looked at how well trustees, leaders and teachers *understood* the standards. Figure 2 shows the extent to which school personnel were *working with* the National Standards, as found in this 2012 study.

Figure 2: Extent to which trustees, school leaders and teachers were working with the National Standards



Trustees working with the National Standards

Trustees need to have a good understanding of the intent of the National Standards and what they mean for their role and responsibilities. It is crucial that trustees understand their

⁵ See Appendix 3 for criteria for making judgements.

obligations with regards to the standards and the board's role in raising student achievement. This includes receiving regular reports from school leaders about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Trustees need the confidence and knowledge to question the information they receive, to use it to set targets in their annual charters, to make appropriate resourcing decisions, and to monitor progress towards targets as part of their ongoing self review.

In the 29 percent of schools where trustees were working well with the standards, this was often attributed to the support they had received to help them understand the intent and nature of the standards and to make relevant decisions based on information reported to them.

A key issue for trustees was ensuring they received regular reports about students' progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards. Not having such information impacted on the relevance and quality of targets set to raise achievement for specific groups of learners. It also made it difficult for the board to monitor progress towards meeting their targets.

School leaders working with the National Standards

Effective professional leadership is fundamental to working well with the National Standards. Highly professional leaders are committed to making a difference to all students' educational achievement. They understand the intent of the National Standards in raising the achievement of all learners and know how to work with their school community to realise this intent. They are skilled at collating and scrutinising school-level achievement information about students' progress and achievement against the National Standards and regularly reporting this to the board of trustees.

Effective leaders recognise the value of using data to make evidence-based decisions to improve teaching programmes, implement and review targeted interventions and plan for PLD. They are proactive in building a school culture in which teachers engage in discussions about data, share teaching strategies and evaluate their impact on outcomes for learners. Leaders ensure that teachers do not work in isolation and take collective responsibility for learners' progress and achievement.

In the 31 percent of schools where school leaders were working well with the standards, it was largely because of their participation in targeted PLD. Such development increased their understanding of the standards and helped them lead development with teachers and the wider school community.

A key issue for school leaders was in helping teachers gather and analyse assessment data to inform OTJs and subsequent reporting to parents and to the board of trustees. The way leaders worked with teachers to improve the quality and usefulness of assessment data was critical to working well with the standards.

Teachers working with the National Standards

Teachers who are confident in working with the National Standards have a good understanding of them and their implications for teaching and learning. They know about the school's targets to raise achievement and respond appropriately through their teaching. Teachers are confident about making OTJs based on multiple sources of evidence and explore ways to moderate their data with colleagues. They work with students to help them

understand their progress and achievement, set goals in relation to the standards, and identify their next steps for learning.

In the 25 percent of schools where teachers were working well the National Standards, it was largely because of the PLD opportunities they had been involved in. PLD increased their understanding and awareness of the standards and of student achievement across the school and within their class. In some schools, teachers were very responsive to targets to raise student achievement, and confidently incorporated the standards into their conversations with students and when they reported to parents and whānau.

A key issue for teachers was finding ways to share information with students about their progress and achievement against the standards that enabled them to take an active role in assessing and reflecting on their learning and determining their next steps to meet or exceed the standard.

A closer look at how schools are working with the National Standards

This section provides more detail about what schools were doing to support their work with the National Standards. It reports ERO's findings about:

- how trustees and leaders used school-level achievement data to set targets in their 2011 charters
- how school leaders improved the quality of their assessment data and associated analysis
- schools' reporting to parents and whānau about their child's progress and achievement against National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics
- how teachers responded to targets through their teaching
- how teachers reported to students about their progress and achievement against National Standards.

Target setting

Setting targets is a key part of a school's planning and reporting process to raise students' educational achievement. It is the core business of a school and requires a collaborative approach in which trustees, leaders and teachers contribute to, and understand, the rationale for the targets and decisions about how to meet them. Ongoing monitoring of progress towards targets is integral to this process.

ERO investigated how schools were using school-level achievement information to set targets to raise student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. At the time ERO reviewed each school, about three-quarters of the 439 schools had set targets related to the National Standards in their 2011 charters. However, the quality and nature of these targets varied considerably.

In schools where targets were usefully focused on accelerating the progress of students achieving below or well below the standards, this was based on a well-considered analysis and interpretation of student achievement information. In-depth analysis by school leaders enabled trustees to set specific targets for groups of students identified as achieving below or well below the standards. The rationale for the targets was clear and explicit. A collaborative approach saw trustees working well with school leaders and teachers to set

them. Trustees were confident to ask questions of the data reported to them and targets were focused on accelerating progress, with a strong commitment to doing just that.

Where action plans were developed to achieve targets, the focus was on the implications for teaching and learning, the provision of targeted PLD, resourcing, and reporting. Progress towards targets was well monitored, with regular updates reported to the board.

ERO identified several issues with target setting, particularly about the usefulness and relevance of targets and the extent to which they were improvement focused. Sometimes trustees and leaders were working in isolation from teachers, with a lack of connection between what the leadership was trying to achieve and what was happening for learners in the classroom. Other issues associated with target setting in some schools included:

- targets not being informed by school-level data
- trustees not receiving information about student achievement against the National Standards
- trustees not being involved in target setting or resourcing decisions
- teachers not being included in decisions about, or aware of, the targets that had been set
- very broad or general targets that were difficult to measure progress towards
- targets not being focused on students below or well below the standards
- a lack of processes to monitor progress over the year
- trustees not receiving regular reports to enable them to monitor progress towards targets.

Just under half the schools that had not set targets were still in the process of doing so at the time of their ERO review, which for many was early in 2011. Of the remaining schools, some had set targets that were not against the National Standards and others had not set any targets. Many of these schools were those that were opposed to working with the National Standards. Poor quality data and/or the recent appointment of a new principal also contributed to the lack of targets in a few schools.

Improving the quality of data and associated analysis

Effective school leaders work with teachers to gather, collate and explore school-level data with an unrelenting focus on using it to improve student achievement. They review and develop assessment processes and support teachers to determine, moderate and report judgements about students' progress and achievement.

ERO investigated how schools leaders were improving the quality of data and associated analysis at a school level. Three key factors emerged that were important to such improvement: relevant external PLD for school leaders in their role; appropriate and timely support for teachers; and review and development of systems and processes.

Where school leaders were improving the quality of their school-level data and associated analysis, this was largely attributed to their involvement in external PLD. Useful PLD focused on:

- increasing school leaders' understanding of the National Standards
- helping school leaders work with the standards in the context of their school curriculum and associated processes of gathering, collating, analysing and using school-level data

- increasing leaders' use of school-level data for making decisions about programmes and resources
- helping leaders improve the quality of assessment processes, including setting clear expectations about how teachers reached their OTJs and associated moderation practices.

Some leaders were working with other schools in existing clusters or networks, or in more recently established clusters with neighbouring or similar schools. In other schools, leaders were supported through coaching from external facilitators, involvement in post graduate study, or first-time principal support.

A mix of internal and external PLD was most successful in supporting teachers to work with data. This often included whole staff, syndicate or team meetings along with some externally facilitated PLD related to school-determined priorities such as literacy or numeracy.

In some schools, leaders worked alongside teachers, mentoring them and sharing professional readings. Leaders introduced new assessments and increased consistency in the use of existing tools. Leaders helped teachers to understand the concept of OTJs and the implications for their practice in terms of moderation and reporting to parents. Teachers were also guided by leaders in their use of data to decide on strategies to accelerate progress.

At a system level, school leaders focused on developing and reviewing the processes to work with the National Standards. Work on systems and processes included:

- introducing new student management systems to streamline data gathering, analysis and reporting
- reviewing the use of assessment tools
- developing various frameworks (rubrics and matrices) to align assessment tools and existing learning progressions with the standards
- developing or refining guidelines and expectations about curriculum and assessment to guide teacher practice, for example moderation protocols, and guidelines for making OTJs
- establishing or reviewing how students' progress could be monitored over time.

Issues and challenges related to school leaders improving the quality of their data and associated analysis included:

- the lack of a current and relevant school curriculum to work with
- limited skills to analyse data well, which limited the ability to identify students needing support
- limited or no school-wide data
- confusion about the difference between National Standards and national norms from other formal tests
- a lack of guidance for teachers about assessment, particularly in the use of tools, making OTJs and moderation
- OTJs being based on insufficient evidence, for example, OTJs based on only one assessment
- finding ways to report on students after 1, 2 and 3 years at school within existing reporting timelines.

Reporting to parents and whānau

Reporting to parents and whānau is integral to home-school partnerships that promote worthwhile engagement between teachers, students and their families. It focuses on building and strengthening partnerships with parents and whānau by reporting each child's progress and achievement in plain language. This includes informing parents about how they can support their child's learning at home.

ERO investigated whether schools had provided parents and whānau with two plain language reports in 2010 about their child's progress and achievement against the National Standards. Sixty percent (263 schools) had reported twice to parents and whānau in 2010 about their child's progress and achievement against the standards in reading, writing and mathematics.

Forty percent (176 schools) did not report twice in 2010. However, a third of these schools partially met reporting requirements. Some reported once, either at the beginning or end of 2010. A few only reported on some aspects of the National Standards, or only for some year levels. The remaining two-thirds did not report at all in 2010. Many of these schools were continuing to report against curriculum levels or school expectations rather than the National Standards. Others did not meet reporting requirements because they were opposed to the National Standards.

Seeking feedback from parents and whānau about reporting

Seventy percent of the 439 schools in this evaluation had sought feedback from parents and whānau about the nature and usefulness of reporting. The most common way of seeking this feedback was through surveys and questionnaires. Other means of seeking feedback included discussion at parent interviews, parent evenings, hui, fono, focus groups, and through informal chats.

Feedback in most of these schools was generally positive, with parents indicating they were happy with the way the school was reporting to them. Parents appreciated the helpfulness and clarity of reports, knowing where their child was in relation to the National Standards, their next steps and what they could do to help at home. In some schools parents were involved in more informed conversations with their child's teacher and found student-led conferences useful as they provided an opportunity to better understand reported information.

Issues parents raised included difficulty with understanding their child's report, especially where there were graphs but no explanation. Some wanted more specific information, for example, if their child was well above or just above the standards. For others, reports lacked information that had been included in the past. There was some confusion for parents who thought reporting on the National Standards would provide them with actual test results.

Teachers responding to targets

The notion of collective responsibility for improving student achievement in schools requires teachers to be 'in-the-loop' and aware of, and capable of, responding to targets in their teaching. This happens best when:

- the school culture supports and expects teachers to work with achievement data in their every day teaching
- teachers have opportunities to engage in robust professional discussion and debate that enables them to share their teaching strategies with colleagues.

Responding to targets in their teaching was not a strong feature of teachers' work with the National Standards. In 15 percent of the schools, teachers were very aware of the targets to improve students' progress and achievement against the National Standards and very focused on accelerating students' progress. Teachers regularly discussed the progress of targeted students with colleagues and actively responded through their teaching. In some of these schools, teachers had contributed to developing the targets and had a good understanding of the school-level achievement data used to determine the targets. Teachers were included in developing action plans that focused on specific strategies to accelerate progress for targeted learners. Such plans often included requirements to monitor progress and were underpinned by a shared responsibility for students' progress and achievement. Regular meetings and discussions about targets and the progress of particular students were common place. Teachers supported each other as they scrutinised their data and shared effective strategies. PLD helped them to improve their data analysis and adopt an inquiry approach to their teaching.

In some schools, teachers were responding in more traditional ways, such as cross-grouping learners across classes for some subjects, grouping for instruction in their own classroom, and differentiating their planning. These strategies were often used without any monitoring or review of their effectiveness in accelerating the progress of targeted learners.

Issues that made it difficult for teachers to respond to targets through their teaching included:

- targets not being shared or discussed with teachers
- targets being too broad or general, making it difficult to identify specific students and impossible to measure progress towards
- a lack of support to help teachers respond to targets
- action plans that focused on measuring progress, but did little to identify strategies to accelerate the progress of targeted learners.

In a few schools, targets had only just been set at the time of their ERO review and teachers had not had time to consider their response to them.

Involving students in their learning

A core aspect of students' learning is the opportunities they are given to assess their own progress and achievement. Such involvement requires active student-teacher collaboration. Developing students' assessment capabilities engages and motivates them as independent learners. In the context of the National Standards, students gain insights into their learning through understanding the knowledge, skills and behaviours specific to each standard. Learners know their strengths and contribute to determining future learning pathways.

ERO investigated how teachers were sharing information with students about their progress and achievement against the National Standards and how students were involved in monitoring their progress and identifying their next steps for learning.

In its previous reports on how schools were working with the National Standards, ERO highlighted this as an area for development.

*The extent to which students were involved in setting and assessing their learning goals related to the National Standards was still not high. Only 32 percent of schools did this well. In its August 2010 report ERO noted this as an area of concern, given it is central to working with the National Standards.*⁶

This is an area that schools are still grappling with, both in terms of involving learners more actively in assessing and taking responsibility for setting the direction of their learning, and in sharing information about their progress and achievement against the National Standards.

Twenty percent of schools were using strategies to help learners understand their progress and achievement against the National Standards. In many of these schools, teachers were involved in PLD activities to explore different ways of sharing information about the standards with learners and working with them to set, monitor and review their goals based on assessment data and discussions. Useful strategies included students:

- having regular conversations about their learning with teachers
- having a ‘common language’ to talk about their progress and achievement and the National Standards
- being involved in writing their formal reports
- leading discussions with their parents and whānau
- being privy to reports before they were shared with parents
- knowing criteria for successful achievement of learning intentions and goals.

ERO identified variable practice in how teachers shared assessment information with students in another 20 percent of schools. Most variation was between teachers in the same school, with some variable practice at a team or syndicate level. In some schools, senior students had more opportunities than younger students to set goals and monitor their progress towards them. Where the approach was not consistent across a school, this was often because teachers had no guidance or expectations to follow. In a few of these schools, PLD gave teachers opportunities to share good practice with each other.

Nineteen percent of schools were developing practice in this area. In some of these schools, teachers were involved in PLD to help them increase students’ involvement in their learning. Some were working towards introducing student-led conferences. Others were focused on improving teachers’ confidence to provide learners with useful feedback. Teachers aimed to increase students’ ownership of their learning goals and involve them in determining their next steps for learning.

In a quarter of the schools, teachers were not yet having good conversations with learners about their progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards. Many schools identified this as a next step. Some saw twice yearly reporting as being only to parents and were yet to understand their obligation to also report to students. Some students knew about their achievement in relation to their classmates but had no evidence or knowledge to support

⁶ *Working with the National Standards: Raising Student Achievement in Reading, Writing and Mathematics*, March 2011.

this. Inability to do this in some schools linked to wider issues associated with assessment practices and lack of understanding about the National Standards.

In 15 percent of the schools, ERO identified well-established practices to involve students in understanding their progress and achievement, but these were not focused on the National Standards.

Support to work with the National Standards

What has helped schools to work with the National Standards?

The most frequently accessed support was external professional development. This was usually specifically related to the National Standards and included workshops, courses, information evenings and practical sessions. Some professional development was not directly about the National Standards, but included a focus on applying the standards to literacy and numeracy. Several workshops and sessions were on aspects of the standards, such as developing assessment practices and making OTJs. Sometimes all staff had attended these sessions; in other cases, the principal or other selected staff had attended and subsequently shared the learning in in-school PLD.

Print and online resources were the next most frequently accessed form of support. These included materials produced by the Ministry, such as self-review tools and leaflets for parents, as well as the Ministry's website. Trustees found these resources useful, particularly when introduced by, and discussed with, school leaders.

In many schools, the principal or senior management team had a good understanding of and/or a strong commitment to the National Standards, and shared this with all staff through in-school professional development.

Often the standards were the topic of discussion at regular meetings, both for lead teachers and all staff. Many schools also held meetings specifically to discuss the standards. In some schools, trustees took part in webinars (web seminars) about working with the National Standards.

School leaders and teachers in a few schools discussed or worked with the National Standards with staff from other schools in their local area. This included moderating data between and across schools, and participating in discussions within their cluster or their local principals' group.

What challenges do schools face in working with the National Standards?

The most commonly cited challenge with implementing the National Standards was concern around the accuracy and moderation of overall teacher judgements. This included teachers' confidence in making judgements, the quality of the achievement information used to make them, and the alignment of various assessment tools with the standards. In some schools, the teachers' capability to make judgements and carry out moderation varied widely across the school.

In schools where the principal, other leaders or teachers either lacked understanding of the standards, or their understanding was quite variable this often carried over to the rest of the staff. In some cases, the variability resulted from a high turnover of staff or leaders.

Sometimes, teachers or leaders who were new to the school and had little prior training or experience in working with the National Standards needed more support to understand developments others in the school had made.

Some school leaders had identified a need to align their school-wide practices with the National Standards requirements. This included aligning the various tools used to make OTJs, ensuring that assessment and moderation processes produced valid and reliable data, and staying focused on *The New Zealand Curriculum* while using the National Standards to support it.

In other schools, staff had difficulty finding time to develop an understanding of the National Standards and work with them. This was particularly the case in small, isolated rural schools, where the principal and school leaders were often also teachers. Several leaders felt the timeframe to implement the standards was too short.

Staff in a few schools found PLD on the National Standards had been unhelpful, of poor quality or confusing. Some schools in remote areas also had difficulty accessing professional development.

What support is needed?

This evaluation highlighted the nature of support schools need to help them work with the National Standards. Schools need help to:

- align their assessment tools with the National Standards
- build capability to analyse and use achievement data, particularly related to target setting and associated reporting of progress and analysis of variance
- increase teacher confidence in making OTJs
- moderate their data.

In a few schools, leaders indicated to ERO that exemplars of OTJs would be useful. They also highlighted:

- the importance of external PLD being available, relevant and tailored to the needs of individual schools, including support for trustees
- the need for time to embed and consolidate changes they are making as a result of working with the standards
- the value of having a ‘critical friend’ to give advice about the robustness of assessment/moderation processes
- the need for support to work with other schools in clusters to learn more about how to moderate OTJs and also to share best practice in working with the National Standards.

Conclusion

In two previous reports about schools' preparation to work with the National Standards ERO concluded that schools were at varying stages in working with the standards. This remains the case.

This report highlights the relationship between strong professional leaders and the confidence and capability of trustees and teachers to work with the intent of the standards. Leaders also have a considerable influence on the extent to which teachers are focused on accelerating the progress of students who are below or well below the standards.

Where schools have the capability and capacity to work with the standards, this is often because they were already well placed in terms of their leaders' capability to use achievement information for improvement and responsive curriculum design. Professional leaders work with the National Standards in a context that accommodates change. They work to align existing practices with the standards and embed change in quite a short period of time.

This report has identified the issues in schools with limited capacity for such change. In many of these schools, leadership is lacking, staff turnover is high and considerable work remains to be done in curriculum and assessment developments that lay the foundations for working with the National Standards.

A recurring theme across ERO's reports on the National Standards is the ongoing difficulty associated with involving students in understanding what their progress and achievement looks like in relation to the National Standards. For some schools, the challenge lies in teachers having sufficient understanding of the standards to engage in meaningful conversations with students about their learning, achievement and progress. Schools also need to build a culture where such conversations can happen in a constructive way that builds productive relationships between teachers and learners and their parents and whānau.

This report also highlights the need for trustees to receive regular reports based on sound school-level achievement information so they can reliably determine targets for specific groups of students. Targets need to focus on accelerating the progress of students not meeting the relevant standards. Sound decision-making depends on trustees regularly receiving well analysed and reported information from school leaders.

In many schools, teachers are not clear about the schools' targets or the strategies they should use to respond to them. Teachers need to be 'in-the-loop' and not only aware of the school targets but also well supported by school leaders to inquire into their practice and its impact for targeted students. They need to know about teaching strategies that are likely to accelerate progress for those students who are below and well below the standards in reading, writing and mathematics. These students are not likely to make expected gains if teachers' practice is not effective in accelerating their progress.

Next steps

ERO recommends that the Ministry of Education continues to provide support for:

- boards of trustees to help them fully understand their role and responsibilities related to the requirements of the National Administration Guidelines and the National Standards, in particular how the standards can assist them to set targets to raise achievement for all students
- school leaders to help them understand the intent of the National Standards and what this means for their role in working with trustees, teachers and parents.

ERO recommends that school leaders support teachers to work with the National Standards by:

- setting clear expectations about and increasing their opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively to make overall teaching judgements (OTJs) and engage in moderation discussions
- making them aware of the school's targets related to the National Standards and ensure they understand best practice strategies to respond to the targets in their teaching.

ERO recommends that teachers:

- increase learners' involvement in monitoring their progress towards meeting or exceeding the National Standards and identifying their next steps for learning
- engage in meaningful conversations with students about how they can progress and achieve at or above the National Standards.

Appendix 1: Statistics for sample of schools

This evaluation involved 439 schools in which ERO carried out an education review in Terms 1, 2 and 3, 2011. The types of schools, roll size, school locality (urban or rural) and decile ranges of the schools are shown in Tables 1 to 4 below.

Table 1: School types

School type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage ⁷
Full Primary (Years 1-8)	217	49	49
Contributing Primary (Years 1-6)	166	38	34
Intermediate (Years 7-8)	28	6	5
Secondary (Years 7-15)	17	4	5
Composite (Years 1-15)	11	3	7
Total	439	100	100

Table 1 shows that composite schools were under-represented, and contributing primary schools were slightly over-represented, in comparison to national figures. Intermediate and Years 7-15 secondary schools were representative of national figures. The differences were not statistically significant.⁸

Table 2: Roll size

Roll size ⁹	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Very small	24	5	11
Small	104	24	22
Medium	172	39	39
Large	99	23	19
Very large	40	9	9
Total	439	100	100

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

⁷ The national percentage of each school type is based on the total population of schools as at February 2012. For this study it includes full and contributing primary schools, intermediates, special schools, secondary, composite and restricted composite schools with students in Years 1-8. This applies to roll size, locality and decile in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

⁸ The differences between observed and expected values in Tables 1-4 were tested using a Chi square test. The level of statistical significance was $p < 0.05$.

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

Table 3: School locality

Locality ¹⁰	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Main urban area	219	50	52
Secondary urban area	27	6	6
Minor urban area	71	16	11
Rural	122	28	31
Total	439	100	100

Table 3 shows that minor urban schools were over-represented, and rural schools slightly under-represented. The differences were not statistically significant.

Table 4: School decile ranges

Decile ¹¹	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Low decile (1-3)	118	27	30
Middle decile (4-7)	182	41	38
High decile (8-10)	139	32	32
Total	439	100	100

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

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

¹¹ 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.

Appendix 2: Evaluation framework

Question 1: To what extent are trustees working with the National Standards as part of their governance role in this school?

What information about student achievement against the National Standards has been reported to/shared with the board of trustees?

What does this information show about:

- Māori student achievement?
- Pacific student achievement?
- The achievement of students with learning needs?

What has this board done to set targets in its 2011 charter?

Question 2: To what extent are school leaders working with the National Standards as part of this school's curriculum and assessment processes?

How are school leaders improving the quality of their assessment data and associated analysis?

Have parents and whānau received two plain language written reports in 2010 about their child's progress and achievement against the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics?

If Yes, What is the nature of this reporting?

If No What are the issues and challenges

What feedback has been received or sought from parents and whānau about the usefulness of this reporting?

How are school leaders using assessment information, gathered in 2010, to set targets to improve student achievement?

Question 3: To what extent are teachers working with the National Standards as part of this school's curriculum and assessment processes?

How are teachers responding to targets through their teaching?

How are teachers reporting to students about their progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards?

Question 4: To what extent is this school working with National Standards to raise student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics?

What has helped this school to work with the National Standards?

What, if any, challenges does this school face in working with the National Standards?

What support does this school need to help it to work with the National Standards?

Appendix 3: Criteria for making judgements

	<p><i>Criteria for making judgement :</i> Trustees are working well with the National Standards</p>
<p>Trustees To what extent are trustees working with the National Standards as part of their governance role in this school?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Trustees have a good understanding of their role in relation to working with the National Standards. The board is well informed about student progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics. The board uses the achievement information it receives to set targets (in conjunction with school leaders) to raise achievement for identified groups of students. Trustees respond to the targets through plans, resourcing decisions and ongoing monitoring of progress as part of the school's ongoing self review. The board has submitted its annual charter (which includes targets in relation to the National Standards) to the Ministry of Education OR is in the process of preparing to do this early in the year.
	<p><i>Criteria for making judgement :</i> School leaders are working well with the National Standards</p>
<p>School leaders To what extent are school leaders working with the National Standards as part of this school's curriculum and assessment processes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> School leaders have a good understanding of the purpose of the National Standards in the context of their school's curriculum and associated assessment practices. School leaders collate and analyse school-wide assessment information and regularly report overall progress and achievement (National Standards) to the board of trustees. They use this information to improve teaching programmes, implement targeted interventions and plan for PLD. School leaders effectively support teachers to develop their confidence in making overall teacher judgements and in associated moderation processes. School leaders have supported teachers to provide at least two plain language written reports to parents, family and whānau about their child's progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards in 2010. Through reporting, parents, family and whānau understand how they can work with the school to support their child's progress.
	<p><i>Criteria for making judgement :</i> Teachers are working well with the National Standards</p>
<p>Teachers To what extent are teachers working with the National Standards as part of this school's curriculum and assessment processes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers have a good understanding of the National Standards and their implications for teaching and learning in their classroom. Teachers are aware of the school's targets to raise achievement and respond appropriately through their teaching. Teachers are confident in making overall teacher judgements based on multiple sources of evidence which, where possible, include at least one norm-referenced assessment tool. Teachers are continuing to develop confidence in moderating their data. Teachers ensure that students understand their progress and achievement, and goals in relation to the standards and what the next steps are in their learning.

