Schools' Provision For Students At Risk of Not Achieving

August 2008

Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of Not Achieving

Contents

Executive summary

New Zealand students achieve very well by international standards. However, there is wide variance in the achievement of learners, which signals the need for a strong focus on good quality, evidence-based teaching for all students, and particularly for the 15 percent of students who are performing at the lowest literacy levels.

In this evaluation report ERO gives an overview of how schools respond to students at risk of not achieving and, as part of the findings, presents examples of how some schools provide effectively for this group of students.

Evidence for this evaluation was collected from 125 primary and 30 secondary schools during their regular education reviews. In addition, ERO gathered information from six schools identified through regular education reviews that had demonstrated effective practices in supporting students at risk of not achieving.

ERO found that the majority of schools could adequately identify students at risk of not achieving, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. There was a much wider variation in the quality and effectiveness of how schools addressed the specific needs of students, and monitored, reviewed and reported on the progress and impact of their provision. In particular, nearly half the schools in this evaluation needed to improve the way that they monitored and evaluated their initiatives or interventions.

ERO found that nearly half the schools reviewed had yet to evaluate the extent to which their programmes resulted in improved outcomes for low achieving students. Review and reporting activities varied between high quality reports based on student outcome data to descriptions of activities and programmes with little reference to the progress achieved by students.

Principals and senior school leaders have a central role in guiding the school's practice for students at risk of not achieving. Most importantly they determine the rationale for the school's provision. Asking the questions about how best to meet the needs of this group requires informed decision-making about the organisation and resourcing that will offer the greatest leverage in improving achievement outcomes for students in the context of their school.

Given the significant investment that many boards of trustees make when employing staff such as teacher aides and other additional personnel, schools need to be clear about why they choose particular options. Trustees need regular information about the use of additional staffing, and the impact that resources and programmes have on students at risk of not achieving. Boards need this information to determine the effectiveness of their investment to make decisions about the future resourcing.

ERO found that effective schools had five noteworthy characteristics of good practice. They were well led, with the principal and senior leaders taking a key role in setting the direction and providing cohesion for the school's approach. Effective schools had well-coordinated systems that enabled support to be targeted to those students most at risk of not achieving. The most successful initiatives involved inclusive and culturally relevant approaches, most often undertaken in the student's regular classroom. Student-focused decisions resided in high quality teaching supported by

initiatives/interventions closely linked to a class teacher's goals and objectives and to a student's classroom progress. Finally, teachers received good quality professional development about how best to teach this group of students, and schools had effective processes to engage the parents and whānau in their child's learning.

Next steps

ERO recommends that principals and senior leaders:

- inform their boards about the nature and extent of students at risk of not achieving, and how their needs are being addressed;

- review and report the outcomes of the school's provision for students at risk of not achieving, particularly the use of additional staffing;

- as a first option in supporting students, operate programmes and interventions in regular classrooms;

- ensure that withdrawal programmes or interventions have links to the students' regular classroom programmes;

- ensure that additional staff, particularly teacher aides, have sufficient training and skills to undertake their allocated roles;

- ensure that programmes for Māori and Pacific students include culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy with a focus upon potential; and

- involve parents and whānau in supporting their children and reinforcing the work done at school.

ERO recommends that boards of trustees:

- monitor the impact of programmes and interventions on raising student achievement, giving particular regard to the board's investment in staffing and resources.

Introduction

This report presents ERO's findings of an evaluation of schools' provision for students who are at risk of not achieving. It includes information about how well schools are supporting this group of students to achieve to their potential and discusses what some schools are doing effectively to support their learning.

Strategic links

The Ministry of Education currently has particular priority areas that support the Government's national priorities[1]. These priorities are interdependent and vital in maximising student outcomes. If students are remain connected to education, training or structured learning until they are 18,[2] the importance of them achieving successful learning outcomes in their primary and early secondary school years is critical. Four of the priorities are of particular importance for students at risk of not achieving.

- *Effective teaching.* This demands appropriately high expectations, up-to-date subject knowledge and the strategies to teach and assess for optimum learning.

- *Foundations and knowledge in schooling.* This ensures that students receive the fundamental knowledge, skills and support to allow them to participate fully in future learning opportunities. Knowledge and skills learnt at school are fundamental to effective participation in society and the workforce.

- *Parents, family and whānau.* The active engagement of parents, family and whanau in their child's learning has a powerful influence over educational achievement. Learning is strengthened when the experiences gained from the school environment complement and support experiences at home and in the wider social environment.[3]

- *Strong professional leadership.* Well-led schools focus on achievement by creating a positive learning environment and by influencing effective teaching. Strong leadership is characterised by the use of evidence-based systems, by leading effective teaching and learning, by operating clear and transparent management systems and by collaborating with other providers.

In its Statement of Intent 2008-2013,[4] the Ministry of Education notes the importance of including the principles of personalising learning in teaching. This is about making learning relevant and meaningful no matter what the level or ability of the learner. It is central to achieving the priorities above. The principles lead to more flexibility and responsiveness in addressing students' learning needs.

For students who are at risk of not achieving, the ability of school leaders to respond appropriately and promptly to identified learning needs is critical to students' participation and achievement. The focus is on students taking greater responsibility for their own learning; parents and whānau being partners in their children's learning;

---

[1] http://www.dpmc.govt.nz/dpmc/publications/government-priorities.html.
[2] http://www.schoolsplus.govt.nz/discussion-document/schools-plus-why.html.
[3] See *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities,* ERO Education Evaluation report, May 2008.
[4] Ministry of Education, *Statement of Intent, 2008-2013* Wellington: inistry of Education, 2008.

and teachers knowing how students learn, and adjusting their teaching to suit learners.[5]

Critical drivers in the success of all students, and particularly those at risk of not achieving, are their presence at school, their engagement and participation in learning, and their success in achieving good educational outcomes. Whether at primary or secondary school, being at school and participating in learning that is both tailored and relevant to a student are precursors of success.

The Ministry of Education's Māori education strategy, *Ka Hikitia - Managing for Success* [6] provides the framework for improving educational outcomes for Māori. It outlines in its approach, levers, focus areas, goals and actions to be achieved to support the realisation of Māori potential. The strategy affirms the importance of students being present, engaged and achieving at school, and places a strong onus on the value gained from positive and constructive relationships with educators, whānau, and iwi in supporting Māori students to excel. Ka Hikitia has as its guiding principles: Māori potential, cultural advantage, and inherent capability. It sharpens the focus on improving the outcomes for Māori students in education to improve equity in the system.

The responsibility for addressing non-achievement is implicit in National Administration Guideline (NAG) 1(iii) and (iv).[7] Each board through the principal and staff is required:

(iii) on the basis of good quality assessment information, to identify students and groups of students:

  a) who are not achieving; and

  b) who are at risk of not achieving.

(iv) to develop and implement teaching and learning strategies that address the needs of students identified above (iii).

ERO used NAG 1 (iii) and (iv) to help structure the approach taken in this evaluation. In particular, emphasis was placed on the quality of assessment information, identification of students and the implementation of effective teaching and learning strategies.

Schools are expected to develop their own criteria and definition for identifying students at risk of not achieving. A standard definition that applies to all schools nationally is not appropriate, as school contexts vary widely. However, a school definition needs to encompass those who are not achieving, as well as those at risk of not achieving, including students who are underachievers. Students defined as having moderate special education needs usually fit within this group.

---

[5] http://www.tki.org.nz/r/personalising_learning/.

[6] Ministry of Education**.** *Ka Hikitia Managing for Success, The Māori Education Strategy: 2008-2012* Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2008.

[7] *http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=8187&data=l.*

Background

Although New Zealand students achieve well by international standards, the evidence gathered in two international studies (PIRLS,[8]PISA[9]) show that there is a significant gap between the highest and lowest achievers.

The 2005/06 PIRLS results showed there was no significant change in the mean score for New Zealand Year 5 students from 2001 but, in comparison to many other higher achieving countries, the spread in achievement between the weakest performing and the strongest performing New Zealand students (the 5th and 95th percentiles) was wide. This was also the case with the 2001 PIRLS results.

The evidence suggests that Māori and Pacific students are disproportionately represented in the lowest achieving group. The 2005/06 PIRLS results showed that the range between the highest and lowest achieving students was greater for Māori than for Pākēha/European, Asian or Pacific. The mean scores for Māori and Pacific students were significantly lower than the international mean with less than half scoring above this mean.

The PISA reading literacy results show wide disparities in New Zealand student achievement. Although New Zealand students perform at a generally high average level, 15 percent did not reach beyond the lowest level of reading literacy (Level 1). In addition, the large variance indicates low equity results. The wide variance in New Zealand learner achievement signals the need for a strong focus on good quality, evidence-based teaching for all learners, and particularly for Māori and Pacific students.

ERO's previous evaluations of provision for students at risk of not achieving

This 2008 ERO report specifically addresses schools' provision for students at risk of not achieving, but previous ERO reports also refer to this key aspect of New Zealand education.

In its 1995 report: *Barriers to Learning,* and again in the 1997 report: *Students at Risk: Barriers to Learning,* ERO drew attention to the importance of students achieving their potential through structured and evidence-based school support. The reports noted the importance of schools' acknowledging that they could have a positive impact on the achievement of all students regardless of home circumstances and starting points on entry to school. Failure to do so was tantamount to continued low levels of academic achievement amongst some groups of students, and continued inequity in educational outcomes.

The June 2005 ERO report *An Evaluation of the Special Education Grant* focused on schools' decision-making processes for the use of this targeted funding. The evaluation found that, although some schools were using the SEG to make a positive

---

[8] Progress in International Reading Literacy Study conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), *http://minedu.govt.nz/goto/pirls.*
[9] Programme for International Student Assessment, commissioned by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD),
http://minedu.govt.nz/data_collections/pisa_research/pisa_2006.

difference to the achievement of students with moderate learning needs, there was considerable variation in their effectiveness.

In many schools assessment practices for identifying students with moderate special educational needs were poor, the focus on literacy needs and programmes was narrow, and they were delivering SEG activities that were contrary to good practice in special education. Of particular concern to ERO were the many schools that fitted students, irrespective of their needs, into predetermined programmes that were funded by their SEG, instead of using effectively analysed assessment information to design programmes that fitted individual student needs.

Methodology

Schools in this evaluation

Evidence for this evaluation was collected from 155 primary and secondary schools during their regular education reviews. The data collection took place during Term 4, 2006 and Term 1, 2007.

ERO gathered additional information from six schools that had demonstrated effective practices in supporting students who were either underachieving or at risk of underachieving. The evidence collected from these schools provided additional material on good practice in supporting students who were not achieving or at risk of not achieving.

Evaluation framework

ERO based its judgements on the following investigative questions. ERO asked whether the school:

- had comprehensive knowledge of the progress and achievement of all students;
- had reliably identified students who were underachieving in relation to other students at the school;
- had specific responses, interventions or programmes in place to meet the needs of underachieving students;
- could describe interventions, programmes or responses that they knew had been successful; and
- had good knowledge about the achievement and progress of identified students.

Evaluation of six case study schools produced contextual information about good school-wide and in-class practice, and answered the following question.

What are the key elements of good practice in identifying and addressing student underachievement?

Findings

The findings of this evaluation are discussed under four headings.

- Identification and knowledge of students at risk of not achieving.
- Specific initiatives to support students.
- School-wide approaches supporting achievement.
- Monitoring, evaluating and reporting the outcomes for students at risk of not achieving.

To reflect the emphasis on good practice, the report includes examples of how schools have responded to students at risk of not achieving.

Identification and knowledge of students at risk of not achieving

Student achievement is likely to be enhanced if teachers use assessment effectively to support high expectations, provide timely and constructive feedback to students, give them resources and assistance, and ensure that teaching is responsive to their needs.[10] Reliable and valid assessment processes are critical in identifying at-risk students and diagnosing their specific learning needs to provide appropriate support for their learning. When the identification process is carried out effectively it provides schools with in-depth information about students' strengths and weaknesses, and helps with decisions about the most appropriate response, intervention or programme to improve students' achievement.

In collecting information for this review, ERO asked school personnel about their knowledge of the overall levels of student achievement and also how they identified students who were deemed to be at risk of not achieving.

ERO found that most schools had useful knowledge about student achievement overall. This was especially so in literacy or numeracy, which was not surprising given the imperative[11] for schools to develop and implement teaching and learning programmes in these two areas, particularly in the early years of schooling. National professional development initiatives designed to enable teachers to respond to student learning processes in literacy and numeracy have also contributed to teachers' pedagogical knowledge and subsequent student improvement in these areas.

Approximately three-quarters of schools were able to reliably identify students who were at risk of not achieving. Twenty percent of schools had some knowledge about this group of students, while about five percent of schools had little knowledge.

For most schools, students at risk of not achieving were seen as those performing below expectations commensurate with their age. Once students' levels of performance were specifically identified, this information was centrally recorded so that data about changes in performance could be monitored. At some schools, students were placed on an at-risk register if assessment determined that they were

---

[10] Education Review Office. *Evaluation Indicators for Education Reviews* Wellington: Education Review Office, 2003.

[11] National Adminstration Guideline 1 (i) (b).

six months or more behind their chronological reading age according to norm-referenced indicators. In some instances students were placed on the school's register where they were at risk in more than one area of literacy, or where literacy and numeracy were both areas of weakness.

Good practice in identifying at-risk students involved thorough analyses of individual, class and year level cohort data by either a group of the school principal, senior managers, special education needs coordinator (SENCO) and learning support teachers, or one of these. These analyses usually included a breakdown of student achievement in terms of gender, ethnicity and year levels as part of a process for identifying any school-wide patterns of achievement that were of concern.

In support of this process, teachers in these schools were also given a clear statement about students at risk of not achieving and how they could be identified in the classroom. Students identified by teachers as needing learning assistance were then considered alongside the school-wide analyses.

Other good practice that helped to identify students who were at risk of not achieving or who were underachieving included:

- the involvement of all staff in identifying individuals and groups of students needing targeted support;
- the use of diagnostic and standardised assessment tools, particularly in literacy, to determine the specific gaps in students' learning and to identify the best match of teaching and/or resource support; and
- the use of information provided by other teachers, parents and contributing schools to identify students who were not achieving as well as they could or those at risk of not achieving.

What is important

The use of assessment tools and practices that are both reliable and valid is crucial in identifying students and diagnosing their specific learning needs. Effective assessment processes give school leaders information about students' strengths and weaknesses, and help them decide on the most appropriate intervention or programme. Effective schools keep an ongoing record or register of students' identified learning needs based on their assessments. They update this document regularly.

Identifying students at risk of not achieving is a shared responsibility. It begins with the classroom teacher and is coordinated at a senior staff level either by an individual or a team. Good identification processes include others, particularly parents, who know about students or who are involved in their learning.

Specific initiatives to support students

ERO found that all schools implemented initiatives intended to support students who were at risk of not achieving. Many of these initiatives supported students' reading literacy, but there were also examples where schools sought to improve oral language, writing, spelling, basic numeracy or behavioural outcomes.

The quality and range of these initiatives varied. Effective schools implemented a diverse range of programmes in response to the specific academic, physical and social needs of their students while some offered limited forms of literacy support, generally isolated from the students' classroom programmes.

The most successful initiatives involved inclusive approaches, most often undertaken in the classroom, alongside the peer group. Students stayed with their class group but received instruction from a teacher aide or additional staff member in a way that supported their learning needs but also helped them to remain connected to their classroom programme.

Perceptual motor programmes[12] were sometimes used with young students in primary schools to improve coordination. These tended to be used with class groups rather than targeted students. Some secondary schools used career development programmes to provide students with a pathway for developing suitable learning skills and goals.

Academic initiatives to support students

Literacy and numeracy focus

In both primary and secondary schools ERO found that three-quarters of student support initiatives had a literacy focus, particularly on reading. This is a similar finding to that in ERO's 2005 report: *An Evaluation of the Special Education Grant.* The various support initiatives were a mix of commercially produced packages such as Rainbow Reading or locally developed booster and mileage programmes. Teacher aides or volunteers usually implemented these support programmes, under supervision of a teacher. Where a school was sufficiently staffed, a senior staff member or SENCO taught these programmes. While there were some very good instances of support programmes operating within the regular classroom, in most cases students were withdrawn for this teaching.

Reading Recovery was the other most frequent reading literacy programme reported in primary schools. It is a school-based early literacy intervention, funded by the Ministry of Education and often supplemented by board funds. It serves a small number of selected students who have made slow progress with literacy learning in their first year of school. Students receive one-to-one teaching from teachers trained specifically to implement the programme. The intervention is designed to support students to reach a reading level commensurate with what would be expected for their age, and then to rejoin their regular class programme. Where a programme of discontinuance monitoring was operating regularly and as expected, schools could demonstrate that students had maintained or improved their reading levels over a period of time.

Programmes to improve student achievement in writing, speaking, listening and spelling were also common forms of literacy support. Literacy skills were sometimes part of an overall individual education plan (IEP) for students. Where IEPs were regularly updated and monitored and where parents had been involved in their development and in home support, the outcomes for students were very positive.

---

[12] Perceptual Motor Programme (PMP) seeks to improve students' coordination, eye tracking, balance and locomotion skills through practising sequential motor skills.

Just under a third of primary schools used parent and community volunteers to assist with students' literacy, especially in reading. Involvement of parents was noted in two of the secondary schools. Peer mentoring, including buddy and paired reading, was also found in 10 percent of primary schools and in two secondary schools.

The effectiveness of school-based literacy support programmes was dependent on the activities being planned in accordance with assessed student needs, adapted in response to ongoing assessment data and linked to students' regular classroom programmes.

Schools were less likely to target numeracy or basic skills in mathematics. A fifth of schools in this evaluation operated support initiatives for students at risk of not achieving in numeracy. As was the case with literacy support, teachers or teacher aides worked with small groups or in one-to-one teaching situations, usually withdrawn from the regular classroom. As with literacy, these programmes were sometimes taught by senior staff or a SENCO, where staffing enabled this to happen.

Use of resource personnel

ERO found that nearly 60 percent of primary schools made use of the services of Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLBs) and 35 percent used Resource Teachers: Literacy (RTLits). Nearly a third of primary schools used other agencies such as Group Special Education (GSE)[13] personnel and resource centre personnel to work with teachers and/or students.

The use of support services was not as evident in secondary schools as it was in primary schools. These specialist personnel tended to work with individual students. Staff in some schools reported that RTLBs also worked with teachers, suggesting or recommending appropriate teaching strategies, and offering a coordination role with students who needed support.

One RTLB provided specific support to a group of boys at a large urban, decile 8 intermediate school. At this school the associate principal and RTLB recognised that the behaviour and achievement of a particular group of boys was inhibiting their achievement in class. These boys were only 'passively engaged' in classroom work, and where possible avoided learning activities in favour of 'drifting' through the day.

The associate principal and RTLB met with the boys to establish clear expectations for learning. They set the boys up with an education diary. Each diary included learning goals, spelling words, a reading log and the notes from each boy about what was to happen each day. Classroom teachers also provided daily comment concerning individual learning and behaviour.

The diaries were checked twice a week by the associate principal and RTLB, who also visited classrooms in which the boys were working. The parents were kept fully briefed about this process and were also able to read the diaries.

---

[13] GSE has a national, regional and district role focused on strengthening the Ministry of Education's overall special education direction and providing special education services to children and young people with high and very high educational, social, behavioural, and communication needs.

The diaries helped these boys focus on their learning, follow classroom routines and build their self-management skills. Furthermore, by targeting the expectations outlined in the diaries, teachers had less direct conflict with the boys and subsequently developed a much more constructive and trusting relationship with them.

What is important

The most effective support programmes have a strong focus on raising student achievement. Teachers help students recognise the progress they are making through well-defined goals and making explicit what they need to do to succeed. The active involvement of students in monitoring their own progress and in getting appropriate feedback about their learning is strongly motivational for students at risk of not achieving.

In addition, the teacher responsible for a student or group of students, structures programmes that are responsive to assessed learning needs. Students are not conveniently fitted into an existing programme. Instead, the programme is discussed, tailored and resourced to meet their learning needs. Responsive teaching is important for all learners and particularly critical for students with special learning needs.[14]

Teachers are knowledgeable about their students and ensure that, where learning programmes are devolved to teachers aides or voluntary adults, these people are fully conversant with the programme expectations and resources, are trained in the teaching strategies to be used and contribute to student feedback and monitoring processes. In the best instances, those responsible for teaching have management practices that focus on and sustain active learning rather than emphasise compliant behaviour.

Social, pastoral and resourcing initiatives to support students

While the learning and progress of students at risk of not achieving is primarily an academic matter there are implicit social and emotional factors associated with effectively responding to their needs. Constructive relationships and the development of an inclusive classroom and school culture were characteristic of those schools that engaged at-risk students successfully.

Schools used many different approaches to meet the diverse needs of these students, including:

- Ministry of Education initiatives (such as the Student Engagement Initiative (SEI)[15] and Te Kotahitanga[16]) to support students identified as being disengaged from learning;

- developmental learning programmes for new entrant and Year 1 students aligned with early childhood curriculum guidelines to strengthen sensory, tactile and kinaesthetic experiences;

- external support personnel to mentor or support identified students with behavioural and learning needs, and to act as positive role models; and

---

[14] Alton-Lee, A, *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration* (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2003), p45.

[15] The Student Engagement Initiative (SEI) is a programme operating in secondary schools to reduce truancy and early leaving exemptions, as well as suspensions.

[16] Te Kotahitanga is a research and development programme focused on improving the engagement of Māori students in learning and achievement.

- resources to assist parents support their children at home.

In some schools, boards, principals and teachers were aware that emotional well-being was a key factor in students' learning. These schools had developed programmes that addressed matters of student social-emotional engagement directly. They had decided how best to give students the pastoral support to help them learn better in their regular classrooms. The examples below outline how two different schools managed this.

At a large urban decile 4 secondary school staff identified that isolation, harassment and exclusion were significant "enemies to success" for students. Staff focused on connecting students to their learning by addressing any social and emotional difficulties they may be experiencing.

As part of this approach the school's guidance counsellors spent up to 50 percent of their time assisting in classes and focusing on the social and emotional well being of students. In all Year 9 classes counsellors facilitated workshops about various forms of harassment that students might face, and the strategies they could use to deal with such harassment.

Year 9 students also completed anonymous questionnaires. These questionnaires helped to identify students who were "suffering silently". A special support programme was put in place for each of these students by guidance staff.

Significant numbers of senior students were trained by guidance staff to become peer mediators. Up to 10 percent of the student population were trained peer mediators, with some of these students also receiving the advanced training. All student mentors were shown how to encourage student connectedness and support student engagement at school.

Various other student support mechanisms helped to complete the positive learning environment maintained by the school. Vertical form classes further fostered connections between students, and a well-developed orientation programme assisted Year 9 students to make a smooth transition to secondary school. While the school still had to develop ways to identify the impact of each of these initiatives, overall they contributed to a school environment in which students generally achieved well compared to schools nationally.

In another urban boys' secondary school, the student support system was significant in helping address issues relating to students at risk of not achieving

The deputy principal, as the manager of the pastoral care network, maintained an overview of student support systems at the school. She was also responsible for learning support systems. The view of the school was that "underachievement was about when kids haven't made connections". As a result the school focused on how students felt about being at school. The emphasis was placed on students feeling safe and happy.

A committee met fortnightly to discuss, track and plan for at risk students. It comprised the health nurse, the RTLB, the learning support teacher and the guidance

counsellor. At each year level, the dean, learning support teacher and classroom teachers met once a term. The presence of both teaching and student support staff at these meetings meant that there was a balance between meeting social and emotional needs when looking at students at risk of not achieving. In the words of the deputy principal, student support systems provided a "powerhouse of learning" at the school.

What is important

Caring and inclusive class and school environments are key determinants in supporting students at risk of not achieving.[17] Pastoral care and support is enhanced by the early recognition of behaviour that is likely to hinder students' learning, and the implementation of interventions or programmes that enable students to optimise the learning opportunities available to them.

Students are more at risk of not achieving where there are issues about their presence and engagement at school. Successful school practice involves well-connected pastoral systems to ensure that students attend regularly and that parents are involved in supporting their child's attendance. At the centre of good classroom strategies are teachers who understood the importance of maintaining constructive relationships with students and their parents, especially in the face of challenging behaviours.

The most effective classroom practice occurs where teachers ensure that their teaching is responsive to both the socio-cultural, emotional and cognitive dimensions of a student at risk of not achieving. These teachers understand the importance of creating a learning environment where a student's background and learning needs are interdependent. They seek ways to adjust their teaching to take account of the particular social, emotional and academic needs of the learner.

The use of resource personnel such as RTLB, RTLit and pastoral networks give teachers the support necessary to implement effective strategies tailored to students' needs. Advice and guidance about how best to proceed is most effective when it is done as part of a group approach with the expertise of each member of the group contributing ideas about a collective support strategy.

Māori students at risk of not achieving

Although Māori are represented at all levels of the achievement spectrum, the range of scores between the highest and lowest achieving students on international measures such as PIRLS and PISA was greater for Māori than for Pākēha/European, Asian or Pacific. Given the high proportion of Māori students represented in the lowest achievement levels, addressing issues for Māori students at risk of not achieving is critical.

There is early literacy evidence of a disproportionate representation of Māori students in intervention programmes such as Reading Recovery. The 2006 monitoring data indicate that 27 percent of Māori boys and 16 percent of Māori girls enter the programme. Both these percentages are higher than for those of the overall gender groups. In addition, Māori are more likely than other students to leave their school before completing the programme.

---

[17] Alton-Lee, A, *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration* (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2003), p22-32.

These data are indicative of the imperative for schools to understand why Māori students may be at risk of not achieving and to intervene in ways to promote Māori success. Where schools in this evaluation proactively sought professional development and support to enhance their understanding and provision for this group of students, interventions were more likely to have positive outcomes. The involvement of teachers in initiatives such as Te Kotahitanga, that has a strong focus on improving Māori student engagement in learning and achievement, provide a good foundation for developing responsive programmes.

ERO found that inclusive, well-structured programmes for Māori students helped those who were at risk of not achieving. These programmes reinforced the importance of accurate assessment and identification, parent and whānau involvement, and the use of te reo me tikanga Māori as an integral part of teaching and learning.

At one school a kaumatua was used to mentor and support students with learning and behavioural issues. Aside from the strong connection the kaumatua made with students at school, he was also able to play a bridging role between the students, their whānau and the classroom teacher. This connection between home and school supported the relationships between adults at home and at school, and reinforced their complementary roles in supporting students at risk of not achieving.

A large urban decile 3 secondary school with a high proportion of Māori students, improved its relationships between staff and Māori students, the achievement of Māori students, and its overall school tone through its involvement with the *Te Kotahitanga* professional development initiative.

Māori student achievement levels improved, with Māori students making substantial progress in Years 9 and 10. While 75 percent of Māori students were identified in the bottom quartile nationally on their entry to school, by Year 10 Māori students at this school were reading at a level comparable to non-Māori.

In the best instances ERO found that schools tailored their approaches to ensure the cultural needs of Māori learners were addressed and they placed their focus on the child's potential to progress. They worked hard at making learning culturally relevant and responsive, and they developed links with whānau that recognised their knowledge and expertise

What is important

Teachers' knowledge and understanding of how to establish effective teaching and learning relationships with Māori students is of prime importance, especially for those at risk of not achieving. Where teaching is inclusive and reflects the student's life, knowledge, relationships and experience, students are more likely to engage with learning.

School leaders play an important part in establishing and sustaining whānau involvement and support. They are also pivotal in ensuring that professional learning has a strong basis in student performance data and that this information informs the sorts of teaching strategies best suited to meet students' needs.

The role played by parents and whānau is essential in developing a two-way partnership for learning. When the school sees a child's whānau and community as valued partners in the education process, and recognises that together there is a lot to learn from and teach one another, the likelihood of constructive learning relationships is more assured. Whānau have a strong role in working with school leaders to ensure the pedagogy is culturally relevant and responsive to their children, and that it is focused on improving outcomes for Māori learners.

Ka Hikitia, the Ministry's Māori education strategy stresses the importance of a 'step up' in system performance to ensure that all Māori can achieve their full potential in education. To do this, the system must fit the learner rather than the learner fit the system. In dealing with issues of Māori learner underperformance and unrealised potential there is a tendency to locate the issue of underperformance in the students themselves. Personalising the school's approach to learning so it is relevant and meaningful, no matter what the level or ability of the learner, is critical for all underperforming students and especially so for Māori.

School-wide approaches supporting student achievement

In addition to specific initiatives to support at risk students, effective schools demonstrated practices that had a positive school-wide impact. These practices represented the management culture of the school, and included leadership, organisational features, and the use of resources.

ERO identified five factors influencing effective practice for students at risk of not achieving:

- professional leadership;
- coordinated and targeted student support;
- support for classroom achievement;
- home-school relationships; and
- professional development.

The following sections focus on the practices followed in schools that addressed the learning of students at risk effectively.

Professional leadership

Effective schools had a clear sense of direction and cohesion driving their strategies to identify and address students at risk of not achieving. The board, principal, senior managers, teachers and support staff had worked collaboratively to define what was needed in their school to support at-risk students. This unity of purpose made it easier for staff to work together and it promoted a collective interest in sharing practice that would improve student outcomes.

Principals of effective schools were the professional leaders for their board and staff. They had a good understanding about classroom learning and knew what was happening for their students, especially those at risk of not achieving. They were visible around the school and tended to engage readily with students in the classroom or in small group situations. Above all, they used evidence from internal review and assessment to help their staff to respond to teaching and learning challenges. These

principals had up-to-date knowledge about best practice. They ensured that this information was disseminated widely throughout the school so that all staff involved with the students knew about and implemented strategies that would make the most difference in raising achievement levels.

Apart from principals' professional leadership, effective schools also had one or more key teacher-leaders who supported other staff in meeting the needs of at-risk students. Such distributed leadership was important in generating a sense of ownership and commitment among staff.

In a large, urban decile 8 intermediate school efficient school management procedures gave teachers clear guidelines on how to respond to students who were underachieving or at risk of not achieving.

Three team leaders organised weekly meetings where issues relating to these students were discussed. At the meetings, teachers helped and supported each other to plan suitable programmes. The learning support teacher also coordinated efforts of the teaching staff by updating team leaders on her work with class teachers in supporting at-risk students.

What is important

All staff have a responsibility to meet the needs of students at risk of not achieving, but in the most effective examples, the principal or a team of senior managers leads the school's thinking and practice in this area. School leaders focus on the use of assessment data to improve the way that students are taught. They keep themselves up to date and ensure that their staff have access to professional learning to support and improve their teaching.

Professional leadership is characterised by the alignment of resources, policies and practices to ensure quality teaching in classrooms across the school. School leaders reflect regularly on the effectiveness of their programmes and policies. They develop and lead an inclusive culture where staff take responsibility for different forms of internal review and subsequent decision-making on appropriate programmes or interventions.

Coordination and targeting of student support

Effective schools met the diverse needs of students through well-coordinated and targeted support. They ensured that there was a suitable person overseeing the way the school responded to students at risk of not achieving. This person usually kept an ongoing record of the goals, programmes or specific support for each identified student. Their work was most effective when they employed a variety of support strategies to meet learning or behavioural needs.

Schools managed the coordination role differently. In many primary schools the special needs coordinator (SENCO) or teacher-in-charge of learning support filled the coordination role. In larger primary schools and secondary schools, a member of the senior management staff or SENCO was likely to fill this position. In some schools, a trained teacher who had limited classroom responsibilities took the role.

In many schools, it was the SENCO who closely monitored student progress and convened meetings of class teachers and teacher aides to discuss teaching strategies and student progress rates. Three functions characterised their role.

They had extensive knowledge of the nature of at-risk students in their school.
As well as tracking student progress and organising regular meetings to monitor the success of intervention programmes, they often prepared evaluative reports for the senior managers and the board of trustees.

They provided support for teachers.
The SENCO provided teachers with information about teaching and learning strategies and resources, and worked in close collaboration with staff. They trained and supervised teacher aides and allocated teacher aide time according to identified student needs and priorities. They sometimes had responsibility for placing students in classes.

They obtained and allocated other support personnel.
The SENCO worked in close association with RTLB, RTLit and Resource Teachers: Māori (RTM). They used specialist support available through the Ministry of Education's GSE. They knew about and used available community resources such as parent and other volunteers to promote students' learning. When necessary, they involved personnel from other agencies such as social workers and public health nurses.

The use of registers, handbooks or database documents was useful in coordinating support programmes for students at risk of not achieving. This ensured that the school had an organised information management system to record the needs and progress of students in classroom or withdrawal programmes. Examples of different registers and handbooks included:

- at-risk registers that contained details of programmes, baseline data from assessment at point of programme entry and conclusion, and anecdotal comment about student progress and development;

- special needs handbooks that detailed specialist external support, school-based support, specific learning programmes targeted at assisting students and the monitoring process to be undertaken; and

- special needs registers set up for each class, monitored by the classroom teacher, and used by the coordinator to identify students' progress and further support required.

Support programmes were most effective when they were designed to meet the specific needs of students, or where programme packages were either modified or tailored for this purpose. The least effective interventions were those where students were placed in programmes where there was no differentiation for their specific learning needs.

Teachers gathered information by using a range of assessment tools. For example, in assessing student literacy, schools used information about students' strengths and weaknesses gained from the Diagnostic Observation Survey,[18] asTTLe, STAR, PAT[19]

---

[18] Known as the six year net.

and Running Record information[20]. The growing use of asTTle by teachers was providing a deeper interpretation of performance results, and giving them choice and control over tests and results. The information gained from results enabled teachers to identify individual and group strengths and weaknesses, gauge progress, monitor patterns and trends, and compare these with national standards.

The Year 7 and 8 department in a Years 7 to 13 urban, decile 5, boys' school provided effective and targeted literacy programmes for its students, particularly those who were at risk of not achieving.

The needs of at-risk students were accurately identified through a range of standardised tests. The results of these tests were then recorded on a central database, which could be accessed by classroom teachers. These records made it possible to chart student progress over time. They also provided staff in the senior school (Year 9 and above) with detailed information about the specific strengths and weaknesses of students so that specific classroom strategies could be developed to best meet a range of student needs.

In the best examples of practice, teachers told students what they were expected to achieve. Effective techniques included the use of learning diaries where students recorded their individual goals and their progress in reaching those goals. In one example, senior primary students were told their reading level, and this was used as base line information for them to gauge the progress they were making towards their reading targets. Goals were also shared with family members so that parents could play a role in reinforcing students' progress at home.

Some effective schools ran an IEP process that resulted in clear and measurable goals for a student at risk of not achieving. It is important to note here that an IEP is generally used only when the regular classroom planning cycle does not provide enough support for an individual student. The process usually involved a meeting between a senior manager, classroom teacher, resource teachers, teacher aide, parents and, in most cases, the student. The IEP not only provided a clear set of goals and milestones for the student's learning, but also provided a way for specific programmes to be targeted to the student's identified learning needs. The student's progress was usually reviewed in a set time, often a term, and changes were then made according to the progress a student had made.

---

[19] asTTle: Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning; STAR: Supplementary Tests of Achievement in Reading; PAT: Progressive Achievement Tests.
[20] Teachers use Running Records to get reliable information about their students' reading skills and fluency. Through observation, scoring, and interpretation, the teacher gains an insight into a student's reading behaviour.

Supporting improved achievement in the classroom

For most students, withdrawal into activities such as individual reading, writing or numeracy programmes was part of an overall school strategy. However, the prime responsibility for improved learning remains with classroom teachers and their ability to adapt teaching to the full range of students' learning needs.

In a quarter of primary schools, and a fifth of secondary schools ERO identified good quality differentiated teaching as the most effective practice in meeting the needs of students at risk of not achieving. Effective teachers had strong support from their senior managers or staff with specific leadership roles in this area. In the best examples, teachers were given:

- useful strategies to help them plan and implement learning programmes for students at risk of not achieving;

- professional development in using standardised and diagnostic tests, analysing and interpreting results and identifying differing levels of ability in the class; and

- trained teacher aides to work with them to support to students at risk of not achieving.

In large, urban, decile 4 secondary school, extensive time and resources were dedicated to improving literacy teaching across subject areas. The school had a multi-cultural student population and for the majority of the school's students English was their second or an additional language. This diversity was reflected in the generally lower than average results in entry level testing.

As a result of this, the school decided that all teachers, regardless of their subject areas, were required to understand and address low levels of student literacy. Under the direction of the deputy principal, they formed a literacy leadership team that analysed student achievement results from standardised tests to provide rich information for meeting specific literacy needs in Year 9 and 10 students.

This group also supported teachers in developing teaching strategies based on analysed information. There was a coordinated team approach to developing students' literacy skills. The emphasis placed on literacy strategies was also reflected in departmental planning sheets that specifically focused on identifying learning needs and classroom teaching strategies.

The school's emphasis on literacy helped it achieve NCEA[21] results above the national average, including a higher than national average for the number of students who achieved the Level 1 literacy requirement.

What is important

Classroom teachers are primarily responsible for improving student outcomes through good quality teaching. To do this successfully they need professional and resource support to enable them to differentiate and adapt their teaching programmes to meet the learning needs of students. Good schools give teachers this support through professional learning and supportive monitoring.

Providing for at-risk students in their own classroom helps include them as part of their peer group. Evidence shows that responsive class teaching can improve learning outcomes for both high and low achievers.[22] Withdrawing students may not be the best way to meet their educational needs. Where a student's needs can be met in the classroom, the academic, social and emotional outcomes may be better for the child.

Home-school relationships

This evaluation identified some worthwhile practices used to strengthen cooperation between the school and parents. These helped schools and caregivers develop a consistent and positive approach to students at risk of not achieving.

Some schools were part of an initiative called 'Home-school Partnerships: Literacy' (HSP:L). This programme contributes to the Ministry of Education's priority of strengthening learning and achievement by involving parents in their children's learning. It began as an initiative to engage Pacific parents in their children's literacy learning by offering sessions in their first language, but has since been broadened to involve all parents in a school's community.

Some other home-school initiatives used in schools showed benefits to students who were at risk of not achieving.

- A home-school partnership contract involving parents and teachers sharing information about how parents could support their children in their learning.

---

[21] National Certificates of Educational Achievement.
[22] Alton-Lee, A, *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration* (Wellington: Ministry of Education, 2003), p45-47.

- A home reading programme with high interest material fostering interest in reading, and involving parents in an interactive way with their children.

- Programme packs for four-year-olds supplied to parents on a weekly basis. The packs included teaching tools and strategies to support early literacy and numeracy development. Parents spoke positively about this initiative and appreciated regular access to resources that supported their child's pre-school experience.

- A weekly 'transition to school' programme for new entrants, developing a partnership between home and school and helping children's literacy and numeracy development.

- A "Dads Do Read" programme involving fathers in reading and discussing a book with students. The intent was to encourage and stimulate those students identified as being at risk, and to promote boys' interest in reading.

Reading seminars were used in some schools to help parents to work with their own children. The literacy teacher spoke with all parents about the results of reading tests and what they could do to help at home. Where appropriate, the teacher modelled good teaching practices that the parents could follow at home with their child.

What is important

Parents want to be involved in their child's learning. This is especially important for parents of students who are at risk of not achieving. Where school leaders actively strengthen partnerships with the home, it is likely that parents feel they have a valued role in their child's learning.

Developing a partnership with parents and whānau involves effective processes for engaging parents at the time students are enrolled, and timely communication with parents concerning any special educational needs their children might have. Keeping parents informed and involved makes them partners in improving their child's outcomes.

Professional development

Professional development for teachers in addressing the needs of students at risk of not achieving had a positive impact in effective schools. Classroom teachers benefited from deeper understanding of how focused teaching could result in improved student achievement.

Effective professional development had a clear focus on identified school needs and was part of an overall strategy for addressing the needs of students at risk of not achieving in these schools.

At a large, urban, decile 10 primary school, staff had data showing that students in Years 5 and 6 were not reading at the expected level. Senior managers and teachers recognised that reading levels could be improved through better group teaching strategies in the classroom.

A strategy was developed to support classroom teachers and provide targeted professional learning. An external trainer was brought in specifically to assist the teachers to develop group-teaching strategies. The training involved the whole staff,

but extended to the trainer and the school's group of literacy leaders working with teachers. The trainer and literacy leaders provided teachers with models of good practice and observed them using particular strategies in class. They gave teachers formative feedback on the quality of their implementation.

In addition to the professional development teachers received, other strategies were used to improve the reading levels of Year 5 and 6 students. These included co-teaching, to develop confidence in using new strategies, and targeted in-class support for some students.

Feedback from staff suggested that this strategy promoted more cooperation among teachers, and formal and informal moments of reflection between staff. The results from end-of-year testing showed there had been a significant improvement in the reading achievement of Year 5 and 6 students.

What is important

Professional learning targeted at improving teachers' knowledge, and developing useful strategies for students at risk of not achieving has an important role in strengthening classroom practice. Professional dialogue and opportunities for teachers to reflect about their practice and to discuss student outcomes in an open and supportive way is beneficial in sharing what works well and in reinforcing good practice.

Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on underachievement

Monitoring, evaluating and reporting student outcomes and programme effectiveness are key elements in a school's management of students at risk of not achieving. These processes are critical for the way information about progress is gathered and analysed and for the use made of this information to raise achievement levels and improve outcomes.

Overall, ERO found that schools were far less effective at monitoring, evaluating and reporting the outcomes for students at risk of not achieving than they were at identifying them or implementing programmes to support them.

The following sections discuss particular areas where school performance could be strengthened.

Use of achievement information

Senior managers, teachers and staff varied in their ability to use achievement information to identify learning needs and to plan appropriate interventions. Schools were generally more able at gathering and collating student achievement information than they were at interpreting the results and determining which intervention would benefit individual students.

ERO did find examples of achievement information being used well to support students at risk of not achieving. These included principals and senior staff:

- setting meaningful targets to raise the achievement of at-risk students, particularly in reading and mathematics;

- helping teachers develop and resource effective classroom programmes matched to the needs of at-risk students;

- identifying the most effective support personnel to address the needs of these students based on assessment data;

- informing trustees about the best way of resourcing provision for students at risk of not achieving; and

- focusing primarily on student achievement as part of the annual planning cycle and decision-making processes.

Achievement information was used most effectively when school boards and senior managers were able to use the data to set school priorities and develop plans for reaching targets related to low achievement. In the best instances boards and managers saw the quality of teaching based on sound assessment as more important than the purchase and use of externally developed programme packages.

In one urban, decile 4 secondary school, addressing underachievement was a school-wide focus based on the analysis of achievement information.

The analysis of achievement information helped the board to understand that there were specific literacy issues at the school. In light of this information, the board, principal and teachers developed a shared commitment to ensuring that low achievement in literacy was addressed. The school's charter plans, and strategic and annual plans were specifically devoted to improving levels of literacy at the school.

The strategic plan set goals and directions related to school-wide literacy achievement. The annual plan identified specific objectives for improving literacy and student achievement especially at the classroom level. All school planning clearly set out required actions, people responsible, timelines for completion and expected outcomes.

Monitoring and evaluating underachievement initiatives

In just under half the schools reviewed, ERO found that schools had yet to evaluate the extent to which their programmes resulted in improved outcomes for at-risk students. This finding was consistent with ERO's 2007 report *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools* which also noted that assessment data needed to be better analysed to identify students' learning needs and to provide more useful, timely information for school reports.

Monitoring and evaluation of school initiatives should be outcomes based. It must ask and answer the question about what difference programmes or interventions have made to students' learning. Monitoring and evaluation should also consider other associated factors such as the effectiveness of the teaching strategies employed, the efficacy of links between what is being taught and learnt in withdrawal programmes and classroom programmes, and whether or not the board's investment in particular programmes or initiatives is yielding the benefits expected for the students they serve.

Most schools use commercially produced readymade learning materials to support instruction or as part of an intervention programme. Where this is the case senior managers should monitor the effectiveness of these packages in meeting the learning

needs of individuals or groups of students. The Ministry of Education has produced a set of guidelines[23] for integrating readymade packages into teaching programmes. These guidelines are based on research that identifies effective teacher practice for integrating commercially produced readymade learning materials into classrooms to meet students' learning needs.[24] The research focused on practice related to the use of literacy packages but the findings could well influence school choices in other curriculum areas. These guidelines form a useful tool for school monitoring and review.

Sound monitoring and evaluation evidence can lead to revised views about the worth of a programme. Teachers in one school used achievement data to confirm that a reading programme they were using was not helpful in improving students' achievement levels. The programme was discontinued. In this instance the school put the students first by using internal evaluation to good effect.

The following examples show the effective use of monitoring and evaluation practices when considering student achievement.

In a small decile 1 primary school, the school made achievement matters visible. They analysed student achievement information and discussed it with all staff to raise awareness of issues that needed to be addressed. Collated trends from the year were recorded on a graph (carefully ensuring there were no student names) so all teachers, support staff, even visitors to the staff room, were aware of how the school was confronting achievement issues, and the progress they were making to address these matters.

In an urban, decile 8 school, the teachers found through standardised testing that students' inferential reading skills were unacceptably low and had been for a while. They realised that something needed to be done and set about modifying their teaching practice to improve these levels.

In a small, semi-rural, decile 2 primary school, the principal and teacher in charge of reading programmes discovered that the students' reading levels across the school had not met expectations. They reported this to trustees, who recognised that programmes needed to change. As a result the board approved the release of the deputy principal to support teachers in improving levels of reading achievement as part of classroom teaching.

What is important

Good classroom assessment and teaching is the first point of intervention for most students at risk of not achieving. Student achievement information is of most use when senior leaders and classroom teachers use data analyses to identify the particular learning needs of students and to determine what will work best to improve achievement for individuals or groups of students.

---

[23] *http://www.tki.org.nz/r/literacy_numeracy/guidelines_integrating_e.php*
[24] Parr, J., Aikman, M., Irving, E., Glasswell, K. (2004). An evaluation of the use and integration of readymade commercial literacy packages into classroom programmes. Wellington: Ministry of Education

Sound monitoring and evaluation is important in determining the effectiveness of class and school-based interventions, programmes and initiatives. Evidence from well-structured monitoring and evaluation can provide school leaders and trustees with valuable information about what interventions work best for students and whether they need to decide on other options. Without outcomes-based information valuable time and resources can be lost for supporting the needs of students at risk of not achieving.

Effective use of staffing

Schools used a variety of approaches for employing teachers or additional staffing to assist students at risk of not achieving.

ERO found that boards and schools generally had a limited knowledge of the impact of additional staffing on improving the achievement of at-risk students. Schools need to know that staff are being used in the most effective way to meet the targets they have set, and to be assured that this resource is used to support educational outcomes. The rationale for employing additional staff should be carefully thought through as part of an overall staffing strategy for the school. For boards, principals and senior leaders, asking which staff member or combinations of staff will be most effective in meeting the needs of students is a critical first step.

In this evaluation, schools found different ways to resource their programmes and interventions. They had to attract qualified teachers and teacher aides as part of meeting their programme commitments and, in some cases, the successful implementation of support programmes depended on the availability of suitable staff. Where schools stressed the importance of effective classroom teaching as the first point of intervention, most used teacher aides as support personnel for the teacher. In other instances schools chose to withdraw students and the resource required to set up and sustain initiatives for a small number of students led to some improvisation in the use of staffing. In smaller schools, the principal often provided additional regular support by teaching small groups of at-risk students. In larger primary schools, the deputy and assistant principals often ran such programmes.

Boards often employed additional staff to work with groups or individual students. In most schools, additional staffing was met through teacher aides. These staff were appointed to operate particular programmes under the supervision of a teacher or, in some cases, to reduce class sizes. Teacher aides took on a range of roles in the school's overall provision for students.

Good practice involved training teacher aides for their specific roles. Training was usually ongoing and was done under the supervision of the SENCO or teacher-in-charge. Sometimes an RTLB from the local school cluster trained them or they attended specific training sessions provided by advisory staff. Teacher aides particularly benefited training by RTLB. This was usually done at the school and reinforced on a regular basis with meetings to discuss the effectiveness of their instructional and monitoring strategies.

Teacher aides, who have had relevant training, assist in teaching students under the guidance of the SENCO. They participate in professional development so they can be more effective in assisting students who underachieve or who have English as second language.

Teacher aides work alongside students in classrooms as well as facilitating withdrawal groups. They are well trained in a range of tasks including the use of self-pacing boxes, reading programmes, speech-language programmes and ESOL strategies. Teacher aides are also trained in physiotherapy and specific disability techniques.

Some schools preferred to use teacher aides to support more able students as part of the classroom programme. The benefit of this approach was to free the teacher to work with the students most at risk of not achieving. This may be the most effective use of the teacher aide resource given that students at risk of not achieving require high quality, focused teaching.

Reporting to the board

ERO found that the quality of reporting to the board varied between high quality reports based on student outcome data, to descriptions of activities and programmes with little reference to the progress achieved by students.

High quality board reports give trustees essential information for making decisions about the staffing and resourcing of programmes to meet the needs of students at risk of not achieving. They help trustees to understand how effective their school's provision is, and alert them to any emerging trends in school achievement.

Examples of useful board reporting in this evaluation included information about the numbers of students who were at risk of not achieving. Reports informed trustees about systemic or curriculum factors contributing to low achievement, such as the quality of numeracy or literacy programmes or the resourcing to support improved student performance. Effective reports included information about the range and nature of learning support programmes and interventions, and about their impact on student learning. In effective schools, information given to boards was clearly presented and contributed to systematic self-review processes.

In an urban, decile 10 primary school, the board requested reports that tracked student achievement and progress in literacy. The trustees were interested in the effectiveness of the school's work in this area, where improvements were necessary and how they as board members could help.

The school's teaching staff subsequently prepared reports about student literacy including information on reading, oral language, writing and spelling. These included relevant information on student achievement expectations, priority areas for targeting, and the results of testing at the end of the year. They also reviewed the "where to next" aims from the previous year and identified next steps for the following year.

In a small decile 1 primary school, the principal prepared for the board a detailed report on reading, using the results of a standardised test for students in Years 4, 5 and 6. The board was given an explanation of the test, what the results showed and how teachers would use these. The concept of 'stanines' was explained so the board could understand the test results. Results were well presented, giving clear information on the performance of students at each class level, and by ethnicity and gender.

The report indicated the number of children who were achieving below national norms and gave eight recommendations to help address these concerns. The board used these to decide the on the best interventions and resources to raise the achievement of this group of students.

What is important

Staffing is one of the most expensive aspects of school budgeting. Boards should have a clear rationale for why they employ additional staffing such as teacher aides or additional teachers. Trustees need regular information about the use of additional staff, and the impact their programmes have on improving student achievement. They need this information to determine the effectiveness of their investment. In this evaluation it was unclear how much boards and schools knew about the impact of additional staffing on improving achievement for those students at risk of not achieving.

The quality of reports the board receive is important if trustees are to make informed decisions about providing for students at risk of not achieving. Reports should give trustees information about how well students are achieving and whether they are making sufficient progress. Reports should also give trustees information about the effectiveness of interventions and support programmes, and alert them to any emerging trends in school achievement. These reports should contribute to the school's internal review processes.

Conclusion

This evaluation gives an overview of how schools are responding to students at risk of not achieving and, as part of the findings, presents examples of how schools respond to their needs. As part of the findings, the report also presents examples of how some schools cater effectively for this group of students.

ERO found that the majority of schools could adequately identify students at risk of not achieving, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy. However, the ways in which schools addressed specific student needs, and monitored, reviewed and reported on the progress and impact of their provision require further work. In particular, nearly half the schools in this evaluation needed to improve how they monitored and evaluated their initiatives or interventions.

In nearly half the schools reviewed, ERO found that they had yet to evaluate the extent to which their programmes resulted in improved outcomes for at-risk students. In this regard, ERO found that the quality of review and reporting activities varied

---

between high quality reports based on student outcome data to descriptions of activities and programmes, with little reference to the progress achieved by students.

Schools make a significant investment when employing auxiliary staff such as teacher aides. Boards need to have a clear rationale for the programmes that they provide and they need regular information about the use of additional staffing, and what impact these programmes have for at-risk students. Boards need this information to determine the effectiveness of their investment.

ERO found that effective schools had five noteworthy characteristics of good practice. They were well led, with the principal and senior leaders taking a key role in setting the direction and providing cohesion for the school's approach. Effective schools had well-coordinated systems that enabled support to be targeted to those students most at risk of not achieving. The most successful initiatives involved inclusive approaches, most often undertaken in the classroom. Good quality professional development was available for teachers and schools had effective processes to engage the parents in their child's learning.

Next steps

ERO recommends that principals and senior leaders:

- inform their boards about the nature and extent of students at risk of not achieving, and how their needs are being addressed;

- review and report the outcomes of the school's provision for students at risk of not achieving, particularly the use of additional staffing;

- as a first option in supporting students, operate programmes and interventions in regular classrooms;

- ensure that withdrawal programmes or interventions have links to the students' regular classroom programmes;

- ensure that additional staff, particularly teacher aides, have sufficient training and skills to undertake their allocated roles;

- ensure that programmes for Māori and Pacific students include culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy with a focus upon potential; and

- involve parents and whānau in supporting their children and reinforcing the work done at school.

ERO recommends that boards of trustees:

- monitor the impact of programmes and interventions on raising student achievement, giving particular regard to the board's investment in staffing and resources.