Inquiry into making the schooling system work for every child

Report of the Education and Science Committee

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Inquiry into making the schooling system work for every child

Recommendations

The Education and Science Committee makes the following recommendations to the Government:

1. More resources should be devoted to the provision of comprehensive professional development in assessment practice so that by 2010 all schools will have experienced appropriate training in the collection and use of data.

2. All schools should ensure that personalised learning underpins the delivery of the curriculum, and in each school review the Education Review Office should report on how well schools are meeting this challenge.

3. The expansion of Te Kōtahitanga should be supported.

4. The schooling system should support worthwhile programmes outside the mainstream for Māori.

5. Teachers should be awarded full registration after two years’ employment only if they have demonstrated that they are able to raise consistently the achievement of their students.

6. Initial teacher education providers should have to guarantee that their graduates can manage students effectively in a variety of learning environments.

7. The Ministry of Education must ensure that excluded students are placed in another school or in alternative education without delay.

8. The Student Engagement Initiative, including the Suspension Reduction Initiative, should be adopted by all schools.

9. Early leaving exemptions should be granted only when a worthwhile alternative is genuinely available. The attendance of exempted students at their alternative programmes, or jobs, should be monitored.

10. Students for whom mainstream schooling is not working should be allowed to transfer to suitable alternatives without necessarily first being subject to serious disciplinary measures. More places on such programmes should be made available.

11. Health and support services should be either on-site at all schools, or consciously integrated with local community services.
12 Early assessment for signs of future barriers to learning, such as hearing loss or poor phonological awareness, should be administered in early childhood education.
1 Introduction

Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realising other human rights.¹

All New Zealanders should be able to succeed at school. What constitutes success depends upon individual talent and potential, but education should provide a foundation for further learning, and equip New Zealanders with the skills to allow them to benefit from, and contribute to, our democratic society and the modern international economy.

International measures of student achievement such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA),² Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)³, and Progress in International Literacy Study (PIRLS)⁴ support the view that in most respects the New Zealand schooling system ranks among the best in the world. It equips most students to contribute to society, and to the economy, as adults.

However, there is compelling evidence that the schooling system does not meet the needs of a significant minority of underachieving students, and that this group is larger than it should be, given the generally good performance of the system. The focus of the inquiry is on how the system can be improved in order to raise the achievement of this group of students.

The Ministry of Education notes that “In every international study in which New Zealand participates, the spread of achievement between New Zealand’s top and bottom performers is wide”.⁵ The large gap between the low achievers and the rest, combined with the comparatively large number of low achievers, causes this group to be referred to as “the long tail”. Our report also refers to “the group of underachievers”.

This introduction describes our consideration of the terms of reference and outlines the characteristics of the group of underachieving students with which the inquiry is concerned. The report discusses underachievement in terms of teachers and classroom practice, whole-school issues, and external agencies.

² PISA is a triennial survey of 15-year-olds in over 40 countries in reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. It is conducted by the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD). The 2006 survey focussed on scientific literacy.
³ TIMSS measures trends in mathematics and science achievement every four years, collecting data from students in years 4 and 8.
⁴ PIRLS is a five-year cycle of assessments that measure trends in reading literacy achievement, and policy and practices related to literacy. TIMSS and PIRLS are conducted by Boston College on behalf of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.
⁵ Ministry of Education, New Zealand Schools 2004, p. 10
Terms of reference

The terms of reference adopted for the inquiry were to examine the following:

- How the system defines the standards of achievement that equate with minimum levels of competence in our schooling processes.
- What these minimum standards of achievement are.
- The size and composition of the group of students who are failing to meet these minimum standards.
- The extent to which current policies are minimising the number of students not achieving these standards.
- Changes that could be made to our current schooling system that might reduce the number of students not achieving minimum standards.

The early stages of the inquiry addressed the first three terms of reference in turn. Though we heard a great deal of valuable and interesting evidence, it was impossible to reach definitive conclusions about any of these issues.

New Zealand’s public examination system became standards-based with the introduction of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) in 2002. NCEA level 1 became the standard qualification for students in their final year of compulsory education. Achievement of the 80 credits required to attain NCEA level 1 could therefore be regarded as the minimum standard of achievement necessary for a school leaver. However, it is not a definitive standard. Students who achieve the minimum eight credits required in both literacy and numeracy may nevertheless not be sufficiently literate or numerate to benefit from, and contribute to, our twenty-first-century economy. Also, NCEA level 1 results record students’ achievements only at the end of their compulsory education. To ensure that schooling is effective, achievement must be measured throughout their school careers.

Thus, there is no agreed definition of the standards of achievement that equate with minimum levels of competence in our schooling processes, or of what these minimum standards are, and we have not attempted to devise one. Professor Terry Crooks of the University of Otago cautioned against setting a measure of minimum standards because of the huge variation in students’ performance and potential.

Assessment tools and examination results enable teachers to measure what students know, and how fast they are learning. The progress and achievement of students can be compared within a class or school, with other New Zealand students, or internationally. How effectively this data is used is discussed later in the report.

The size of the group of students who fail in the schooling system cannot be quantified precisely. We examined data from NCEA and other assessments used in New Zealand schools, and from international studies. Different indicators produce different results, making it impossible to arrive at an exact figure, but most suggest that it is between 10 percent and 20 percent of the school student population. Even the lower end of this range represents an unacceptably large number of young New Zealanders leaving school ill-equipped for their adult lives.
Some data, such as that for NCEA pass rates, shows a steady improvement over recent years, suggesting that this group may be shrinking, but this has yet to be verified by international comparisons.

To an extent, the group is a cross-section of the school population, but it is not a representative sample. Māori and Pasifika students are over-represented, for example. There is a strong correlation between social and economic well-being and success in the education system.

This report focuses mainly on the final term of reference, and addresses the fourth by commenting on some of the current policies and initiatives we heard about in the course of the inquiry.

The terms of reference did not include factors outside the schooling system, such as the home backgrounds of students.

**The “tail” of underachievement**

New Zealand’s best students perform with the best in other countries but there is a group at the bottom, perhaps as large as 20 percent, who are currently not succeeding in our education system.\(^6\)

This comment in the Education Review Office’s annual report for 2005 stimulated the discussion that led to our decision to conduct an inquiry into making the schooling system work for every child, as it suggested that it was not working for an alarmingly large number of students. We understand that ERO’s 20 percent estimate represents an aggregation of data from various sources, including PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS, as well as NCEA results. Professor John Hattie of the University of Auckland has also said that the bottom 20 percent of the achievement range is a cause for serious concern.\(^7\)

It is difficult to determine the size of this group of underachieving students. However, evidence from national and international assessments and studies support the proposition that New Zealand has a disproportionate number of students who underachieve.

**Examination data**

Achievement rates for NCEA have steadily improved in most categories since its inception in 2002. For example, in 2006, 60 percent of Year 11 students attained level 1 or above, compared with 55 percent in 2004.\(^8\) The proportion of students who do not achieve NCEA level 1 has diminished, but is still big enough to constitute evidence of significant underachievement in the schooling system.

In 2004 22 percent of students who were in year 11 had not achieved NCEA level 1, or an equivalent National Qualification Framework (NQF) qualification by the time they left school.\(^9\) Three-quarters of them did not achieve the minimum literacy and numeracy

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\(^7\) Professor John Hattie, Presentation to Knowledge Wave Conference 2003


\(^9\) Most of these students left school in 2004, though some did not leave until 2005, and a few remained into 2006.
Of 2006 school leavers, 11 percent left the schooling system with little or no formal attainment.\textsuperscript{11} This figure is a great improvement compared with the 18 percent of 2002 school leavers without formal attainment, but it still represents more than 5,000 young New Zealanders who left the school system with nothing to show for more than ten years of compulsory schooling.

In 2006 13.1 percent of year 11 students achieved the minimum NQF requirements in either literacy or numeracy, but not both,\textsuperscript{13} and 7.8 percent achieved neither.\textsuperscript{14} Though the percentages of students achieving an NQF qualification have risen consistently in recent years, these figures mean that more than 10,000 sixteen-year-olds did not achieve minimum requirements in literacy and numeracy in 2006 (though some of them may subsequently do so).

**International comparisons**

International comparisons confirm that the achievement of some New Zealand students is among the best in the world. For example, of the 57 countries that participated in PISA 2006, only two performed better than New Zealand overall.\textsuperscript{15} Only three countries had a significantly higher mean reading literacy performance, and only five recorded a significantly higher mean mathematical literacy score. With Finland, New Zealand had the largest proportion (4 percent) of students achieving at the highest level of scientific literacy. These results are the product of outstanding teaching in New Zealand schools.

However, PISA 2006 observed a considerable diversity of achievement among New Zealand students, with a larger proportion at the lower end of the range than in other high-achieving countries. For example, 15 percent of students did not reach beyond level 1 in reading literacy. While this is better than the OECD average of 20 percent, it is significantly larger than the figure for the three best-performing countries. In scientific literacy New Zealand’s 5th percentile score was significantly lower than those of eight of the ten other highest performing countries.\textsuperscript{16}

UNICEF has produced league tables of educational disadvantage.\textsuperscript{17} The lowest-placed countries in each league are the most disadvantaged.

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\textsuperscript{10} Minister of Education, *New Zealand Schools 2006*, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{11} New Zealand Qualifications Authority, presentation to the Education and Science Committee, 28 February 2007.
\textsuperscript{12} Minister of Education, *New Zealand Schools 2006*, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{13} NCEA is the usual NQF qualification taken by year 11 students. Eight credits in literacy and eight in numeracy (of 80 credits overall) are the minimum requirements for the award of level 1 NCEA.
\textsuperscript{14} A small number of candidates who sat only non-NQF examinations may be included in these figures.
\textsuperscript{15} Ministry of Education, *How ready are our 15-year-olds for tomorrow’s world?*, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, p. 10.
New Zealand was 11th of 24 developed nations on the basis of the reading, mathematics and the science literacy of 15-year-olds, and mathematics and science achievement in the 8th grade (Year 9 in New Zealand terms).

New Zealand was 23rd of 24 in rankings of the difference between the 5th and 50th percentile in the reading, mathematics, and science literacy of 15-year-olds (PISA), and of mathematics and science 8th-grade achievement (TIMSS). This result means that the low achievers were approximately five years behind the average year 8 student. Only Belgium had a larger gap between average and low-achieving students.

New Zealand was 20th of 24 in absolute disadvantage in mathematics, a ranking based on the percentage of 8th graders not reaching the median of mathematics achievement of all children in all countries (TIMSS 1999).

Achievement of Māori and Pasifika students

There is much evidence of Māori and Pasifika students achieving at high levels. In 2006 12 percent of Māori school leavers attained NCEA level 3 or higher in 2006 (compared with 37 percent of non-Māori). The highest-performing Māori and Pasifika students score higher than the national average on almost all tasks in NEMP tests, and there are many examples of outstanding achievement by such students.

However, Māori and Pasifika students are also over-represented in underachievement statistics and most other negative indicators in the 2006 NCEA results.

- 22 percent of Māori leavers left school without formal attainment, double the figure for all groups (Pasifika leavers, at 12 percent, were only just above the national average).

- 42 percent of Māori, and 37 percent of Pasifika year 11 students gained an NCEA qualification; 69 percent of European/Pakeha and Asian year 11 students did so. Māori boys performed worse than Māori girls, though the disparity reflected that in the general population.

- 60 percent of Māori, and 56 percent of Pasifika students met both literacy and numeracy requirements for NCEA level one by the end of year 11; whereas 76 percent of Asians and 79 percent of European/Pakeha did so. Though the proportion of Māori and Pasifika in both categories has increased, the gap between them and the other groups has not diminished significantly.

The 2006 PISA report recorded that the mean score of Māori students (477) and Pasifika students (461) was weak compared to the OECD mean (492). The mean score of European/Pakeha students was 542.

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What the tail means for New Zealand

Consequences for Māori

Professor Mason Durie represented the disparity between the achievement of Māori and non-Māori as long-term education debt. He argued that constant improvement should be the aim for all groups, but that until the disparity in Māori achievement is corrected, Māori will continue to feature disproportionately in indicators of poor outcomes, and will be a wasted resource for New Zealand.

In 2005 28 percent of newborn New Zealanders were Māori. The growing proportion of Māori in the population means that if the gap between the performance of Māori students and others is not addressed, the negative consequences for New Zealand will grow exponentially. We are particularly concerned about the high representation of Māori in the tail, and will address the issue of raising Māori achievement in this report.

Economic effects

Various statistics concerning economic well-being demonstrate that students who fail at school are heavily disadvantaged in later life. In 2006, the unemployment rate for those with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 2.1 percent; for those with another tertiary qualification 2.9 percent; with only a school qualification 4.1 percent; and with no qualification 5.2 percent.\(^{21}\)

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The median weekly income for those with bachelor’s and higher degrees was $785; for those with other tertiary qualifications it was $575; for those with school qualifications it was $335; and for those with no qualifications $310.\textsuperscript{22}

As employment becomes less labour-intensive, and more dependent on the use of technology, fewer jobs will be available for those who lack functional literacy and numeracy. The larger this group, the more difficult it will be for New Zealand to create and sustain a high-performing, internationally competitive economy.

**Health and social issues**

There is overwhelming evidence that the longer students stay engaged in schooling, the better their outcomes in later life, including their health.

The New Zealand Medical Journal has reported on the health of students in alternative education in the northern region of New Zealand, many of whom are part of the tail of underachievement.\textsuperscript{23} As a group, these students faced many more threats to their health than did secondary school students. A lack of good health is one cause of some students being part of the tail. If their health problems could be overcome, they would be able to learn more effectively.

**Crime**

Judge Andrew Becroft, the Principal Youth Court Judge, presented powerful evidence about the connection between non-engagement with school and youth offending. He estimated that up to 80 percent of offenders in the Youth Court are not attending school, either because they are not enrolled, or because they are suspended or excluded. It would be reasonable to assume that many of this group are part of the tail of under-achievement. It has been estimated that 25 to 30 percent of youth offending takes place between 9.00 am and 3.00 pm. Engaging all young people of compulsory school age in education would reduce the crime rate among this group significantly.\textsuperscript{24}

Young Māori offend at twice the rate of young Pasifika people, and at four times the rate of young Pakeha.\textsuperscript{25} The graph on the next page shows the rate of police apprehensions of 14 to 16 year-olds as a proportion of the population of that age group for each ethnicity.\textsuperscript{26} In the longer term, failure at school contributes to the establishment of a vicious circle that leads to recidivist offending. The Ministry of Social Development presented evidence that gaining stable employment helps young offenders to desist from offending, particularly if their jobs offer learning opportunities.\textsuperscript{27} Students who fail at school clearly have less chance of obtaining such employment.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{24} Judge Andrew Becroft, *Background Notes for the Education and Science Committee Inquiry*, 8 August 2007.
\textsuperscript{26} Ministry of Justice, *Youth Justice Statistics in New Zealand: 1992 to 2006*.
\textsuperscript{27} Ministry of Social Development, response to committee questions, 16 July 2007.
Police apprehensions of 14 - 16 year-olds for non-traffic offences

- Maori
- Pasifika
- NZ European or other

Apprehensions per 10,000 of the population

2 The teacher

Assessment practices

The National Administration Guidelines require every Board of Trustees, through the principal and staff of the school, to undertake the following processes:

(ii) through a range of assessment practices, gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable the progress and achievement of students to be evaluated; giving priority first to:

   (a) student achievement in literacy and numeracy, especially in years 1-4; and

then to:

   (b) breadth and depth of learning related to the needs, abilities and interests of students, the nature of the school's curriculum, and the scope of the New Zealand curriculum (as expressed in the National Curriculum Statements);

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

   (a) who are not achieving;
   (b) who are at risk of not achieving;
   (c) who have special needs; and
   (d) aspects of the curriculum which require particular attention;

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

This guideline aims to put good assessment practice at the heart of the schooling system. Accurate, comprehensive assessment enables teachers to plan appropriate learning programmes to build upon students’ knowledge and skills and address their learning difficulties. It also enables schools to report on what students have achieved to parents and the wider community.

Persuasive evidence was presented to the inquiry that inconsistent assessment practice hampers the development of appropriate learning programmes in many parts of the schooling system. The most significant inconsistencies in the effective use of assessment occur within schools, between classrooms or teaching teams. The failure to observe the National Administration Guideline means that students do not learn progressively and cannot steadily improve their achievement. This is particularly damaging to the under-achievers, for whom the consequences of following an unsuitable learning programme can be lifelong.

Assessment tools

A wide variety of assessment tools are available. They can provide teachers with a wealth of information about what students know and can do, and can be of immense value in planning programmes that will enable students to improve their achievement.
Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) is in common use.28 Developed for the Ministry of Education by the University of Auckland, asTTle provides information about a student’s achievement in literacy and numeracy, relative to the curriculum achievement outcomes for levels 2 to 6, and national norms of performance for students in Years 4 to 12. Reports are generated to show what students know, what gaps they have in their learning, and what they need to learn next. The results also indicate how well students are learning in comparison with other students in New Zealand. AsTTle software also provides information on the strengths and weaknesses of individuals and groups, and can be used to measure progress.

Other commonly used formative assessment tools include the Assessment Resource Bank, the Burt Word Reading Test, the Junior Oral Screening Tool (JOST), the New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars, Numeracy Project Assessment (NumPA), PM Benchmarks, Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT), Prose Reading Observation, Behaviour and Evaluation of Comprehension (PROSE), Running Records, School Entry Assessment, the Six-Year Net, and the Supplementary Test for Achievement in Reading (STAR).29

Use of assessment data

We are satisfied that teachers have plenty of suitable assessment tools at their disposal. Our concern is that the schooling system as a whole is not using the huge potential of these tools to support the creation of programmes to improve the achievement of students. This is an issue for all students, but is particularly important for those in the underachieving tail. The gaps and deficiencies in the learning of these students cannot be corrected until they have been precisely diagnosed.

An Education Review Office (ERO) evaluation (March 2007) of how effectively schools collected and used assessment information revealed that only half of the 314 evaluated schools demonstrated effective assessment practices, and only 44 percent of schools used worthwhile assessment information which gave an accurate picture of the achievement of students across the school.30

We acknowledge the risk of imposing too many assessment demands on teachers, some of whom feel that some assessment uses time that would be better spent on curriculum delivery. It is not practical to assess all students in all learning areas. However, improvements can be achieved by making better use of assessment data. ERO reported that in over 40 percent of schools teachers were investing time and energy in assessment activities that did not result in useful information about students’ achievement and progress.31 We do not advocate more assessment, but smarter use of assessment. It is essential that all teachers are able to use the data generated by the assessment tools to plan programmes that will challenge their students and enable them to make continuous progress.

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28 By July 2006 93 percent of secondary schools and 77 percent of primary schools had ordered asTTle, according to the Ministry of Education.
31 Ibid.
Professional development

Access to good professional development is essential if assessment is to be used effectively throughout the schooling system. The Assess to Learn (AtoL) programme is one of the main vehicles for the delivery of professional development in assessment. It aims to improve teachers’ understanding of formative assessment. AtoL is delivered to 230 schools each year (usually with a two- or three-year commitment). Only 35 percent of primary schools and 13 percent of secondary schools had participated by the end of 2006.32

AtoL and other professional development programmes in assessment are critical to the diffusion of good assessment practice throughout the schooling system. We recommend that more resources be devoted to the provision of comprehensive professional development in assessment practice, so that by 2010 all schools have experienced appropriate training in the collection and use of assessment data. This would make a considerable difference to students’ achievement, particularly among the tail.

We discuss the importance of addressing this issue in teacher training courses elsewhere in the report.

Effective teaching

Elsewhere in this report, we discuss the importance of ensuring that all New Zealanders of school age are at school, or participating in a meaningful alternative programme. But of itself, attendance will achieve little unless students are learning. A common theme in the evidence was the importance of teachers engaging students, though we were reminded that engagement does not necessarily lead to learning.

There is much good teaching in New Zealand schools. This section of our report explores ways to ensure that teaching is effective throughout the schooling system.

Good teachers

Professor John Hattie of the University of Auckland told us that teachers account for about 30 percent of the variance in achievement, whereas students and their homes account for about 60 percent.33 The factors that influence students are complex. They include students’ cognitive ability, and their social and economic circumstances. The 2003 PISA report said that a disadvantaged home background and parental occupation are powerful factors influencing performance.34 These issues are not in the control of schools and the education system, and are outside the scope of our inquiry. Raising the general standard of teaching so that it is in line with the best is the quickest means of bringing about improvement in the achievement of students.

If the schooling system is to work for every child, teachers must be able to constantly improve the achievement of their students, regardless of age or ability.

33 J. Hattie, Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?, paper delivered to the Australian Council for Educational Research Annual Conference, October 2003
34 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2003, New Zealand Summary Report, p. 20
Professor Hattie has distinguished five dimensions of excellence in teachers. Teachers who possess all five dimensions demonstrate the ability to

- organise and use content knowledge flexibly so that lessons are responsive to individual students and their needs.
- create a classroom climate optimal for learning, in which questioning by students is frequent and engagement is the norm.
- monitor learning so that problems can be anticipated and prevented or removed, and give regular feedback that students can use to improve their learning.
- respect students as learners and people, be receptive to their needs, and demonstrate care for and commitment to them.
- set challenging tasks that engage students and result in a deep understanding of key ideas and concepts.

**Personalised learning**

The basis of personalised learning is the knowledge teachers have of their students, collected from observation and assessment, and of their backgrounds. Teachers who enable personalised learning in their classrooms recognise that some students may need extra tuition or different examples to understand a concept or issue. They will organise lessons accordingly. The ability of teachers to establish individual relationships with every student underpins personalised learning.

For many teachers this approach is part of established good practice. For example, a recent report on the teaching of mathematics said that 69 percent of teachers recognised and met the needs of diverse groups of students effectively. However, this leaves almost a third of students at risk of having their needs unmet in a key subject. This is particularly important for the tail of underachievers, for whom a one-size-fits-all approach has not resulted in meaningful learning.

The provision of appropriate learning materials supports personalised learning. These materials must be carefully designed and evaluated for appropriateness for the range of students for whom they are intended.

Ensuring that students understand the process of learning, as well as its content, is an important part of this approach. They should be able to recognise the knowledge they have gained and understand that learning consists of building on it. This allows them to have high expectations of their learning, and to take control of it.

All schools should ensure that the principles of personalised learning underpin the delivery of the curriculum, and each Education Review Office school review should report on how well schools are meeting this challenge.

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35 Education Review Office, *The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Mathematics.*
Progression

Evidence was presented that students do not make consistent progress throughout their school careers. Professor John Hattie identified a three- to four-year period, starting in the upper levels of primary school, in which performance levels out and more students fall below expectation as defined by New Zealand Curriculum levels. Students may become more difficult to engage in these years, but Professor Hattie contended that even when engaged, they too often follow programmes that reinforce what they already know and can do, rather than moving on to learn something new.

Progression has to be integral to all learning programmes at all ages. It can only be achieved if accurate assessment data is available and if teachers can use the data to design learning programmes in which progression is planned for.

Consistency of quality

There are many fine teachers in New Zealand schools, and examples of outstanding practice are plentiful. However, the quality of teaching varies considerably. Few schools display consistently high achievement in all classes and teaching groups. There is often more disparity between classes within a school than there is between schools. Variations in the quality of teaching are the main reason for these differences. Students who have good teachers throughout their school careers are less likely to underachieve than those who do not.

ERO reports on the quality of teaching in Years 4 and 8 suggest that most primary teaching is of a good professional standard. In mathematics, for example, 75 percent of the teachers observed designed and implemented programmes that reflected the New Zealand Curriculum accurately, and 77 percent demonstrated the subject and pedagogical knowledge required to offer high-quality mathematics programmes. Even so, this leaves about a quarter of teachers who do not meet these standards. In other subjects this proportion is bigger. The students of these teachers may be disadvantaged, those in the tail particularly so. Schools must be aware of weaknesses in this respect and should act quickly to rectify them.

Professional standards

Because what we know about how students learn is constantly developing, it is essential that the teaching workforce applies up-to-date and appropriate practices. Therefore professional development, including appraisal, needs to be aligned with the school’s focus, which should be based upon research and assessment. The training of principals to lead school-based improvement is essential to maintaining professional standards.

Engaging Māori students

ERO has reported that 10 percent of schools were highly effective in engaging Māori students in learning, 54 percent were effective, 33 percent were sometimes effective, and 3

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36 Professor John Hattie, Presentation to the Education and Science Committee, 6 September 2006
37 Education Review Office, The Quality of Teaching in Years 4 and 8: Mathematics.
percent were not effective. Only 44 percent of schools had evidence of improved learning outcomes among their Māori students over time.

International comparisons show that monocultural countries have less variation in students’ achievement than multicultural countries. The over-representation of tangata whenua in the tail presents a particular challenge to New Zealand’s education system. Teaching methodologies and training must acknowledge the diversity of New Zealand’s school population, and foster in teachers the ability to “walk in the shoes” of all their students.

All the characteristics of good teaching discussed elsewhere in the report apply to Māori students, particularly personalised learning, and the use of good assessment data. Only 30 percent of schools were effective or highly effective in collating and analysing data on Māori students’ achievement. ERO informed us that some initiatives intended to raise the achievement of Māori students are not making effective links between learning and assessment. Teachers with good classroom management skills will provide a good learning environment in which all students can prosper. Professor Mason Durie emphasised the importance of inspirational teachers for Māori.

ERO reported these indicators of success in engaging Māori students in learning:

- Students say that their teachers have high expectations of them.
- Attendance of Māori students is comparable with that of non-Māori students.
- Students say that they enjoy and value their school experiences.
- Students are engaged meaningfully in learning processes and share responsibility for setting learning goals.
- Classroom teachers link assessment data to their teaching practices.
- There are strong, positive, and supportive learning relationships between students and their teachers.
- Learning contexts reflect the interests, prior knowledge, and experiences of Māori students.

Te Kōtahitanga

The Te Kōtahitanga project aims to improve the achievement of Māori students in mainstream secondary school classrooms by changing teachers’ practice. Professor Russell Bishop of the University of Waikato, who heads the programme, focused on the long-term economic benefits for New Zealand of improving Māori achievement.

The project devised an Effective Teaching Profile (ETP), based upon the experiences of Māori students and their whānau, principals, and teachers. It is implemented in the classrooms of participating teachers by means of a professional development programme.

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38 ERO, presentation to the Education and Science Committee on Māori achievement, 6 December 2006.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
Te Kōtahitanga has shown that when Māori students have good relationships with their teachers, they can succeed at school. The approach depends upon teachers rejecting “deficit theorising,” which explains and accepts lower achievement by Māori; believing strongly that Māori students can improve their achievement; and building caring learning relationships with Māori students. It requires students to take responsibility for their learning and performance.

Monitoring of the performance of Māori students whose teachers have participated in Te Kōtahitanga reveals that they achieve significantly more in numeracy than Māori students of other teachers. There were also gains in literacy for all Māori students whose teachers took part in the project, the greatest gains being in the lowest ability groups, in which Māori are over-represented. The most impressive literacy gains in the classes of teachers who took part in the programme were from the lowest third of the achievement range.

Māori students whose teachers were in the project achieved significantly higher results in numeracy than others. Overall Māori and non-Māori taught by teachers involved in the project made similar progress in literacy.

We are aware of criticisms of Te Kōtahitanga by Professor Roger Openshaw. Though broadly supportive of the goals of the project, Professor Openshaw questions whether the claims made for its success are conclusively confirmed by the data presented, challenges some of the key assumptions underlying the project, and suggests that the professional development programme needs modification.

Many of the principles of Te Kōtahitanga are those that underpin good teaching of students of any culture. Te Kōtahitanga advocates personalised learning with particular regard for Māori. Though the programme must be observed in more schools before conclusions can be reached about its effectiveness, the evidence so far suggests that it has changed the teaching methodology of many teachers, with considerable benefits for students.

We note the success of Te Kōtahitanga, and regard the project as offering the schooling system a positive framework that can be used to improve the learning of Māori students. We recommend that the expansion of the programme be supported.

A flexible approach

There are examples of alternative models for Māori education that have benefited Māori students. They include kura kaupapa Māori, Māori boarding schools, and designated character schools. Evidence about the Tū Toa programme was presented to us. Based at Massey University, the programme provides an alternative approach to secondary education with a strong focus on educational achievement, using sport and tikanga Māori as a catalyst to improve learning. The Correspondence School provides some of the academic content of the programme. Tū Toa is an example of how a more flexible

42 Ibid.
approach can be particularly beneficial for Māori. The schooling system should support worthwhile programmes for Māori outside the mainstream.

Māori Education Strategy 2008–2012

We were briefed by the Ministry of Education on Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success, the Draft Māori Education Strategy 2008–2012. This document reports welcome improvements in some key indicators. For example, it is noted that the percentage of children who received some form of early childhood education immediately before starting school rose from 86 percent in 2002 to 90 percent in 2006. The percentage of Māori early childhood teachers who are registered increased from 23 percent to 45 percent.

Further challenges have been recognised. Only 87 percent of Māori children who start school in decile 1–4 schools have participated in early childhood education (over two-thirds of Māori children start school in decile 1–4 schools), compared with 94.5 percent of all children. The number of kohanga reo has decreased from 562 in 2001 to 486 in 2006.

At school level there has been a 26 percent increase in enrolments in Māori-medium education since 2000. Improvements have been evidenced for Year 4 Māori students in mathematics from 1998 to 2002, and in reading and writing from 2000 to 2004. In 2006, 14.8 percent of Māori students left school with a university entrance qualification (compared with 36.3 percent of the general population), a 61 percent increase since 2002. However, in 2006, 20 percent of Māori students left school before their sixteenth birthday, more than three times the rate for non-Māori. In 2005, 53 percent of Māori boys left school with no formal qualifications.

At tertiary level there have been increases in participation and progression to higher studies, though much of this participation is at sub-degree level and the number of Māori students studying for bachelor degrees has decreased recently.

The strategy has established a detailed action plan. Focus areas are the foundation years, engaging young people in learning, Māori language education, and organisational success. Each focus area has priorities, goals, expected actions, provisional targets, and outcomes to be seen in five years. These features specify how progress is to be made and will allow it to be measured throughout the duration of the strategy.

We are impressed with the vision of Ka Hikitia and believe that it provides a well-considered and potentially strong blueprint for the next five years. It addresses issues raised in this report. If the strategy is adhered to, and sufficiently resourced, it could reduce the size of the tail significantly. We will monitor the impact of the strategy annually.

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3  The School

The principal

The principal has a crucial influence over the success of a school, and the quality of the learning of its students. It is the responsibility of the principal to ensure that the school gives all its students the opportunity to learn, and to constantly improve their knowledge and skills. Good leadership from the principal can solve some of the problems described in this report, or prevent them from occurring.

Safe environment for learning

Students cannot learn at their best unless they feel safe and secure at school. Bullying and poor behaviour are two of the greatest threats to safety and security. All students have a right to learn in a safe environment, unimpeded by disruptive behaviour.

In PISA 2000, 31 percent of students reported disruption of classes by students. This figure increased to 41 percent in 2003. Reports of bullying increased from 10 percent to 15 percent. Reports of students lacking respect for teachers increased from 19 to 24 percent (these are measurements of perceptions, rather than observed events).

TIMSS surveys in 1998 and 2002 questioned principals about behaviour and discipline in their schools. The responses revealed a small but general increase in the perception by principals of classroom disturbance, intimidation and verbal abuse of students and staff, and the risk of injury to students or staff. The Ministry of Education believes that disruptive behaviour may have increased slightly since 1998, but there has not been a rapid increase in such behaviour.\(^45\)

There is a need for research on the extent to which being bullied, or feeling unsafe at school, affects academic performance, perhaps leading students to become part of the tail. We heard anecdotal evidence from students for whom this was the case.\(^46\) We recommend that the Ministry of Education undertakes work on this issue.

Some schools have benefited from seeking World Health Organisation accreditation as a “Safe School”. This involves addressing a number of safety areas, such as emotional intelligence, limiting violence, and sun, water, and road safety. All schools must monitor themselves constantly to make sure that they are providing a safe environment for students. There are many examples of good practice in this respect across New Zealand.


Exclusions, expulsions, suspensions, and stand-downs

Exclusions and expulsions

In 2006, 1,556 students were excluded from schools, a rate of 2.1 per thousand students. This rate has varied from 2.2 per thousand to 1.9 per thousand in the period from 2000 to 2006. In 2006, 75 percent of exclusions were from secondary schools, and 80 percent of all schools had no exclusions.

Of excluded students 55 percent enrolled at a new school or returned to their suspending school, and a further 39 percent enrolled on a recognised alternative programme. The most common declared reasons for exclusion and suspension are continual disobedience, misuse of drugs, and physical assaults on other students.

Age-standardised exclusion rates for all students by ethnicity are:

- European/Pakeha: 1.3 per thousand
- Māori: 5.6 per thousand
- Pasifika: 4.2 per thousand

A further 150 students who had passed the compulsory school leaving age were expelled, the most since 2003. Of these 123 did not continue with compulsory schooling.

Age-standardised expulsion rates for all students by ethnicity are:

- European/Pakeha: 1.0 per thousand
- Māori: 2.3 per thousand
- Pasifika: 7.0 per thousand

Placing excluded students

Judge Andrew Becroft estimated 80 percent of offenders appearing in the Youth Court not to be formally engaged with the education system. Many of them were not enrolled, but were “drifting” between schools, often because they were excluded from one school and awaiting placement at another or in alternative education, or had been granted an early leaving exemption and were awaiting placement on training courses. In Judge Becroft’s view the most useful step that could be taken to reduce youth offending would be to keep every young person actively involved in some form of education until the age of 16. He reminded us that every excluded student is a problem relocated, not a problem solved.

A provider of alternative education also gave evidence that delays of weeks or months are common in the placement of excluded students. It must be accepted that mainstream schools will not work for some students. However, the schooling system must provide for

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47 All statistics in this section, apart from where stated, are from Ministry of Education, A Report to Schools on New Zealand Student Engagement 2006.
49 Ibid.
50 Judge Andrew Becroft, Notes for the Education and Science Committee inquiry, 8 August 2007.
51 Martin Kaipo, Otangarei Youth Sports and Recreation Trust, 15 August 2007.
all students of compulsory school age, and the Ministry of Education has a responsibility to ensure that students who are excluded are placed elsewhere without delay. We are not convinced that the ministry is meeting its obligations in this regard. The ministry must ensure that excluded students are placed in another school or in alternative education without delay.

**Suspensions**

In 2006 there were 5,008 suspensions from schools, of which 75 percent were from secondary schools. The overall rate of suspension is 7 per thousand students, and that for secondary students is 14 per thousand students, the lowest it has been from 2000 to 2006. About 75 percent of schools did not use suspensions.

Of the 296 secondary schools that suspended students, 224 had 19 or fewer cases, 65 had 20 to 39 cases, and seven had more than 40 cases. These seven schools accounted for just over 10 percent of all suspensions from secondary schools. The wide differences in suspension rates between schools merit further investigation.

Age-standardised suspension rates for all students by ethnicity are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Rate per thousand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand European/Pakeha</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand Māori</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than 70 percent of suspended students are male. The average duration of suspensions in 2006 was 19.9 school days.

Students from decile 1 and 2 schools are five times more likely to be suspended from school than those from decile 9 and 10 schools.

**Stand-downs**

In 2006, 22,467 students were stood down, a rate of 31 per thousand students. Both the total and the rate were the highest in any year since the stand-down option became available to schools in 1999. In 2000 the rate was 24 per thousand students. Age-standardised stand-down rates for all students by ethnicity are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Rate per thousand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand European/Pakeha</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand Māori</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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52 All statistics on suspensions and stand downs are from Ministry of Education, *A Report to Schools on New Zealand Student Engagement 2006*.
54 Ministry of Education, information supplied to the committee, 6 December 2007 (quoted figure is for January to June 2006, only included those students who returned to school or homeschooling after being suspended or excluded).
56 Ibid.
The increase in stand-downs partially offsets the reduction in suspensions, though stood-down students are out of school for a much shorter period (2.5 school days on average).  

**Suspension Reduction Initiative and Student Engagement Initiative**

The Suspension Reduction Initiative (SRI) was established in 2001 to counter this disproportionately high number of Māori suspensions. Since October 2003 it has been part of the Student Engagement Initiative and in 2005 an additional focus on Pasifika suspensions was introduced.

The Suspension Reduction Initiative targets schools with high suspension rates, particularly of Māori students. Each school determines an appropriate intervention or programme to reduce its suspension rate. The emphasis is on replacing punishment with prevention, though schools employ a wide variety of initiatives to reduce suspensions, and they usually use a combination of approaches rather than focusing on a single practice.

Strategies have included establishing remedial literacy and numeracy programmes; calling on the resources of the Māori community; restorative practices; youth mentoring; working with multiple external agencies to co-ordinate services to schools, students, and their whānau; drug education/intervention programmes; and career planning or goal-setting assistance.

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**Age-standardised suspension rates for secondary schools by Student Engagement Initiative 2000 to 2006**

![Graph showing age-standardised suspension rates for secondary schools by Student Engagement Initiative 2000 to 2006](image)

The initiative has succeeded in reducing suspension rates, with schools in the original cohort dropping from 16.3 students per thousand suspended in 2000 to 9.7 students per 1,000 students in 2006.

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57 Ministry of Education, information supplied to the committee, 6 December 2007 (quoted figure is for January to October 2006).

thousand in 2006. There was a small increase in the overall age-standardised suspension rate for secondary schools that were not involved in SRI in the same period.

The principal of a high school with a high proportion of Māori students presented evidence on the impact of SRI on his school, which had previously had a high rate of suspension. The culture change involved in resorting less to suspension had been difficult for many staff, but he endorsed the initiative. His school, like many involved in SRI, changed its policy on the misuse of drugs, to treat it as a health rather than discipline issue. This resulted in more students seeking help to give up drugs. It also initiated a restorative justice programme.

The Student Engagement Initiative, including the Suspension Reduction Initiative, should be adopted by all schools.

Truancy

Findings from a 2006 attendance survey indicate that 4.1 percent of students truant for all or part of each school day. This is unacceptably high. Truancy rates are highest among Māori and Pasifika students. It is reasonable to assume that the group of under-achieving students is well represented among the truants. Avoidable absence of any kind is disruptive to learning, and its impact will be greatest on those who find learning difficult. We explore elsewhere in this report the implications for crime of students being absent from school.

Absence condoned by parents is an important part of the truancy problem in some communities, with the highest incidence in the crucial first two years of school. Parents taking children on holidays in term time is an aspect of the same issue, although is not recorded in truancy figures.

Many schools have procedures that allow them to follow up absences quickly, often on the day on which they occur. The certainty that unexplained absence will be followed up is a strong deterrent to truants. All schools should have such procedures, and make reducing truancy a high priority.

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59 Minister of Education, *New Zealand Schools in 2006*, p. 27.
### Standardised frequent and infrequent truancy percentages, by ethnic group and gender (2006)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total Roll</th>
<th>Standardised Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent truants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>70,190</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>74,109</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144,299</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30,123</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31,201</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61,324</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25,796</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27,451</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53,247</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9,541</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10,531</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,072</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>185,607</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>194,690</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>380,297</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>321,257</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>337,982</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>659,239</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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4 Systemic issues

Teacher education

Teaching requires teachers new to the profession to do the same job as experienced practitioners from day one. No teacher can start their career with the advantages that they will accrue from years of experience, but every student deserves to be taught by competent professionals. It is the responsibility of teacher education providers to ensure that all teachers who complete their training can be thus described.

This is a complex and demanding task, but priority should be given to classroom skills and effectiveness. Training courses must reflect the changing nature of teaching and be quick to adopt good practice and reflect new knowledge. They should ensure, for example, that the principles of Te Kōtahitanga are understood and practised by trainee teachers who may work in schools that have embraced them.

Dr Kevin Knight of the New Zealand Graduate School of Education noted a slow decline in the standards of behaviour in classrooms over the last twenty years and emphasised the need to teach teachers to establish a respectful, calm, work-focused classroom. Initial teacher education providers should have to guarantee that their graduates can manage students effectively in a variety of learning environments.

We are concerned that some new teachers appear to be unfamiliar with assessment tools that are in common use. It is essential that initial teacher education equips new teachers to use the data collected by these tools to design worthwhile programmes for their students.

There was disagreement among witnesses from the teacher education sector about the appropriate length of undergraduate courses. Some favoured a reversion to a four-year course, others thought three years adequate. We believe that focusing on the number of years a course takes is misconceived. It is the number of weeks of learning that it covers that is important. A course that mirrors school terms and occupies 40 weeks a year for three years can cover as much as one that operates for 30 weeks a year for four years.

Provisionally registered teachers

It is essential that all teachers in their first and second years in the profession be monitored and assessed rigorously, and supported in their efforts to become fully competent practitioners.

Staffing provision of the equivalent of one day a week is given for an experienced teacher to support the probationary teachers in their professional growth during their first year in employment. All schools should use this resource for intensive professional development. Teachers should be awarded full registration after two years’ employment only if

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61 Dr Kevin Knight, presentation to the Education and Science Committee, 19 September 2007.
62 For full-time teachers.
they have demonstrated that they are able to raise consistently the achievement of their students.

Non-enrolment of children of compulsory school age

A 2005 study of young people in Counties Manukau found high rates of non-enrolment among offenders, and among young people with complex chronic health issues, major health problems in their families, or gang affiliations. This pattern is repeated in many parts of New Zealand, and the lack of a national database to identify school-age students not enrolled in any school has made it difficult to bring them within the system. Students who do not attend school are underachievers by default, but may not appear in statistics that indicate low achievement because they are not enrolled.

In 2006 ENROL, a central electronic enrolment register, was implemented in intermediate, secondary, and restricted composite schools. The scheme was extended to all other schools in 2007. The ENROL scheme should establish a consistent and accurate process for recording students’ enrolment in and transition between schools, and allow the tracking of all students of compulsory school age. We expect the information gathered by ENROL to be used to reduce the problem of non-enrolment significantly.

Early leaving exemptions

Early leaving exemptions can be granted to 15 year-old students under the Education Act 1989 if the Secretary for Education is satisfied that it is sensible to do this because of a student’s educational problems or conduct, or the estimated benefit of their staying at school. Parents apply for exemptions, and must provide details of the training programmes or employment to be undertaken by the student if the exemption is granted. Many of those granted early leaving exemptions are part of the tail of underachievement.

In 2005, 7.5 percent of the 15-year-old student population were granted early leaving exemptions. Of 4,511 applications, only 320 were refused. The proportion of the cohort to be granted an exemption in 2006 fell to 6.6 percent. The granting of so many exemptions is another strong indicator of the failure to engage this group.

In 2006, 18 percent of Māori boys and 12.6 percent of Māori girls were granted early leaving exemptions. This is another indication that Māori are over-represented in the group of under-achievers.

We understand that the ministry intends to further reduce the number of exemptions granted. We support such a reduction. Early leaving exemptions should be granted only when a worthwhile alternative is genuinely available. The attendance of exempted students at their alternative programmes or jobs should be monitored.

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63 TNS and Monarch Consulting, Consultation on “Staying on at School”, 2006.
65 www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/statistics/data_cubes/student_participation/early_leaving_exemptions, accessed 29 November 2007. Note an adjustment has been used on data to account for the large number (10%) of ELX applications missing ethnicity data. See http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/technical_info/guidelines/data_cube_user_guides/ELE_Users-Guide.pdf for an explanation of this adjustment.
Early leaving exemption rates per 100 for 15 year-old students by gender and ethnic group, 2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasifika</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ European</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Education provision outside the mainstream

It must be acknowledged that there is a group of students for whom mainstream schools will not work. Some young people learn better away from the school environment. Many of this group form part of the tail of underachievers.

In 2006 3,448 students were involved in alternative education. Of these, three-quarters were aged 13 or 14, two-thirds were male, and three-fifths were Māori. Such programmes have 1,820 places available at any one time. To be eligible for these places, students must display one or more of the following characteristics:

- have been out of school for two terms or more
- have a history of multiple exclusions
- have been referred to the Correspondence School as a last resort and then dropped out of it
- have been absent for at least half of the previous 20 weeks for reasons other than illness, and being unable to maintain a mainstream programme as a result
- have been suspended or excluded and are at risk of further suspensions/exclusions.

Alternative education, as defined by the Ministry of Education, is seen as a last resort and is available only after students have been in serious trouble, or have demonstrated severe alienation from school. **Students for whom mainstream schooling is not working should be allowed to transfer to suitable alternatives without necessarily first being subject to serious disciplinary measures. More places on such programmes should be available.** Even under the current criteria, there are insufficient places to meet demand, which is one reason for delays in placing excluded students.

Alternative education must be defined widely enough to embrace a variety of approaches. It is essential that all such courses are monitored for quality. They should exercise the rigour necessary to produce long-term benefits for the students. It is the methodology of alternative education that should be “alternative”; the expectations of the outcomes should be as high as they are in the mainstream. When any student is placed on an alternative

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66 Ibid.
67 Minister of Education, *New Zealand Schools 2006*, p. 27
programme a plan must be established for them to be fed back into the wider community, either to school or to employment.

**Private Training Organisations**

Two private training organisations presented evidence of the success of their programmes for students aged 15 to 18 who had failed in the schooling system for various reasons, including poor behaviour and being bullied. Many made good progress in the different learning environment provided by the training organisations. Students follow personalised programmes and are given responsibility for managing their learning at their own pace, with frequent one-to-one contact with a tutor. As a result, some students developed literacy and numeracy skills they had not acquired at school, and were more likely to find worthwhile work as a result.

Evidence was presented that referrals from schools and colleges have “dried up”, despite a long record of success with students previously referred. We were told that Gateway schemes are preferred by schools, and that referrals may now be made by parents, youth workers, or Children, Youth and Family Services.\(^{69}\)

The evidence presented by the training providers emphasised the importance of offering various learning styles to school-age students, particularly those in the tail who may not be suited to the learning styles used in many classrooms. Some secondary students of compulsory school age make more progress in this environment than at school. They should have the option of enrolment with a provider that offers teaching methodologies that meet their needs.

**Partial enrolment**

We recommend that students with particular learning requirements should be able to enrol at more than one school or provider simultaneously. This is permitted only for certain Correspondence School courses. Some students would benefit from a programme that mixes school with another approach to learning and a mixed funding model that facilitates this.

**Teen parent units**

Evidence was presented about the success of teen parent units in allowing young parents to continue their education. Units are expensive in terms of spending per student, but are cost-effective in the long term, as they increase the capability of young mothers to be independent in their later lives.

We support the development of teen parent units in areas where they are not available.

**Correspondence School**

From 2000 to 2006 the number of alienated and excluded students on the Correspondence School’s roll increased from 876 to 1,518, while its total roll fell from 30,606 to 23,558. In 2006, 46 per cent of these alienated and excluded students were Māori.\(^{70}\)

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\(^{69}\) Submission from Porirua City Training Ltd, 25 September 2006.

Judge Becroft asked whether the Correspondence School has become a “dumping ground” for students who cannot survive in secondary education, and are enrolled at the school only so that they are statistically within the schooling system.  

The Correspondence School, in relation to the terms of reference of this inquiry, described itself as having a pivotal role in meeting the needs of alienated students. Its focus is on “hooking” them back into education by establishing a supportive and trusting relationship, providing a safe environment, delivering an appropriate programme of learning, and providing opportunities for them to experience a sense of achievement and self-worth. The digital environment provides many more opportunities in this respect than the original correspondence model and we encourage the Correspondence School to pursue these opportunities.

The school suggested a possible model in which alienated students would be enrolled at base schools in their communities, but might be located elsewhere for much of their learning. Collaboration between the Correspondence School, the base school, and community agencies would be important.

Health issues

Undiagnosed and unmet medical needs

Research into the AIMHI initiative to improve achievement in decile 1 schools in South Auckland and Porirua has shown that there is a strong connection between good health and the ability to learn. We heard about the importance of students “being teachable”. Health problems can seriously affect learning.

In 2005, a comprehensive health assessment was undertaken of 916 Year 9 students in AIMHI schools in Manukau as part of the AIMHI Healthy Community Schools pilot project. It found health issues that could have a serious impact on the achievement of the affected students.

- 59 percent needed referral to healthcare providers.
- 14 percent required referrals to social services.
- 13 percent failed the vision test.
- 7 percent failed the hearing screening test.

Some of these students may have gone through most or all of their school careers with conditions that can have a devastating effect on learning, attitude, and behaviour, but which if diagnosed can be easily corrected. It is uncertain how many of the tail of underachievers have medical conditions that have affected their learning, but it is likely to be a significant factor for some.

The AIMHI schools are located in some of New Zealand’s most socially and economically deprived areas. However, though the problems found in these schools may be more acute

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71 Judge Andrew Becroft, Notes for the Education and Science Committee inquiry, 8 August 2007
72 Kay Hawk and Jan Hill, presentation to the Education and Science Committee, 12 September 2007
and numerous than elsewhere, there are students with undiagnosed or unmet health needs throughout the schooling system.

**Health and support services in schools**

Health centres were established in schools as part of the AIMHI Healthy Community Schools pilot project. Visiting health practitioners supplement the service provided by school nurses and other pastoral staff. The report on this initiative concluded that the provision of school-based health centres in AIMHI schools improved the health of the students and contributed towards better attainment in NCEA.

Those students with poor access to healthcare and poor understanding of and involvement with healthcare in their communities have most to gain from the presence of health centres in schools. A significant proportion of the tail is in this category. However, all students can benefit from an on-site facility that specialises in youth health issues, as the introduction of health and wellness centres in a number of higher-decile secondary schools has shown.

The report recorded various improved health outcomes, as well as more general benefits such as less absenteeism, and more engagement of students with school culture, and even teachers no longer feeling responsible for detecting health issues.

On-site health centres have most effect when complemented with support services such as social workers. In the AIMHI project, these services have succeeded in improving links between school and home, in advocating for students, and in accessing community services and funding. The Social Workers in Schools programme has shown the benefits of having support services located in schools, but is limited to lower-decile schools and is not usually complementary to a health service.

**We recommend that health and support services should be either on-site at all schools, or consciously integrated with local community services.** Having easy access to health and support services would mean that health problems affecting young people and their learning could be dealt with effectively. It has the potential to benefit every student, with those in the tail having most to gain.

**Health screening for pre-school children**

We support initiatives that will reveal health problems in pre-school children. A newborn hearing screening programme, to be available in all areas by 2009, will enable early intervention to correct hearing impairment, helping children with congenital hearing loss to acquire age-appropriate cognitive and spoken language skills. The B4 school checks, nationally available to four- and five-year-olds from February 2008, will help to deal with some of the health problems that impede learning in the early school years.

**Phonological awareness**

Professor Gail Gillon presented some persuasive evidence on the importance of phonological awareness to early literacy.\(^\text{74}\) Phonological awareness is the explicit understanding of the sound structure of words and is a strong predictor of early reading

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achievement. It allows readers to decode unknown words, and helps them to recognise words in print. Early decoding helps children to “teach themselves” to read. Facilitation of phonological awareness and letter knowledge in the preschool years will help at-risk children begin school with strong skills in these areas.

Professor Gillon’s research indicates that 14 percent of Year 1 and Year 2 children are likely to require specialist intervention to succeed in their early literacy development. Many of these children are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and it is likely that some will become part of the tail of underachievement. Early diagnosis and intervention could have a dramatic effect on the literacy and educational progress and achievement of some children in this group.

Early assessment for signs of future barriers to learning, such as hearing loss and poor phonological awareness, should be administered in early childhood education.

Students on the autism spectrum

We did not collect evidence about the proportion of underachievers who are on the autism spectrum, but believe that if the schooling system is to work for every child, the needs of autistic students must be understood and addressed. A considerable amount of research on autism has become available in recent years, but New Zealand education has been slow to respond to it. Action on this issue is needed urgently.

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour

Resource Teachers: Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) were established in 1999. Their primary role is to provide specialist support to, and work with, students and teachers in order to improve the education outcomes for students with moderate learning or behaviour difficulties. There are 769 RTLB positions in 195 school clusters. About 50 RTLB Māori provide support to Māori students. The RTLB service costs $74 million per annum.

An evaluation of the RTLB service by the Education Review Office (2004) raised significant concerns about its efficacy. It reported that only 20 percent of RTLB clusters had substantial evidence of improvements their services had made to student achievement, and the lack of evidenced impact on Māori achievement was a particular concern. The Ministry of Education told us that action has been taken in response to the issues raised in the evaluation, but that it could not yet demonstrate increased effectiveness as a result.

The RTLB service should be a key resource for students in the tail of underachievers. If, as currently structured, it cannot demonstrate that it is bringing about universally significant improvement in the achievement of these students, the service should be re-aligned in accordance with best practice.

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75 Phonological awareness is not to be confused with the teaching of reading using the phonics method.
Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement

Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement (TFEA) began in 1995, replacing the Learning Assistance Allowance staffing entitlement and Equity Grant schemes. Its purpose is to provide additional resources to enable schools to overcome the barriers to learning that students from low socio-economic communities encounter. It is decile-linked, with funding provided on a sliding scale from $749.89 per student in decile 1A schools to $23.95 per student in decile 9 schools.

In 2007, $108 million was distributed as TFEA. School accounting systems do not require tracking of how TFEA, as a component of the operations grant, is spent, and therefore it is not possible to determine how effectively it is being used.

TFEA is intended to raise achievement, and under the present system it is impossible to assess its effects in this regard. We recommend the introduction of a requirement for schools to report on the programmes and activities funded out of TFEA, with likely outcomes based on best evidence.

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5 Conclusion

The report focuses on aspects of the New Zealand schooling system that need improvement. It is important to reassert that the great majority of students receive an education that is of a very high standard in most respects. Our recommendations are made with the intention of giving all students excellent opportunities to learn. The focus of the inquiry has been on those who fall behind, often never to catch up. Some of our recommendations are for the schooling system in general, as this group of underachievers has most to gain from such improvements.

We have based our recommendations upon the premise that good teaching leads to good learning, with students of all ages and levels gradually but constantly improving their knowledge and skills. We wish to build upon the strengths of the teaching profession so that the high-quality learning evident in many classrooms becomes the norm in all. More rigour in teacher training and appraisal of classroom practice is an important element in achieving the raising of standards that we seek. We have recommended ways in which teachers can be supported in achieving higher standards, and all teachers equipped to use the wealth of data available from assessment tools most effectively.

We encourage a focus on personalised learning, using a range of ways to engage students. Most elements of personalised learning are already regarded as good practice by many teachers. There is little about it that is new, but the diffusion of good ideas through the schooling system can be slow. Our recommendations seek to accelerate the process.

We have paid special attention to the challenge of improving Māori achievement because of the disproportionate number of Māori students who underachieve. As Professor Mason Durie pointed out, creating parity of achievement will require more improvement among Māori than any other section of the population.

A change of approach is needed towards students who cause most discipline problems. The focus of their teachers at present is on managing their behaviour rather than their learning, and the disruption they cause may seriously affect the learning of others. They inevitably make their way through the suspension and exclusion system. Some benefit from good alternative education courses, but more either drift through the schooling system, or find themselves outside it, and often in trouble.

There is no single answer to this problem, but we propose a package of measures to address it. The Suspension Reduction Initiative has shown that schools can change their methods and attitudes without lowering their expectations. The schooling system must accept that some young people will learn more effectively outside the mainstream. Good alternative education must be supported, and regarded as more than a way of occupying difficult students. Where students are recognised as at risk of disengagement from school, they should be given the opportunity to try another approach to learning. All young people of compulsory school age must be placed somewhere in the wider system.
We believe that our proposals could enable many more young New Zealanders to leave school properly equipped for the rest of their lives. They will benefit immensely, and so will the country, both socially and economically.
Committee procedure
In March 2006 the Education and Science Committee of the 48th Parliament resolved to conduct an inquiry into making the schooling system work for every child. The committee invited selected organisations and individuals to make submissions on the inquiry. The committee met between 22 March 2006 and 13 December 2007 to consider the inquiry.

Committee members
Hon Brian Donnelly (Chairperson)
Paula Bennett (from 5 December 2006)
Hon Mark Burton (from 7 December 2007)
Dr Ashraf Choudhary
Jacqui Dean (until 5 December 2006)
Hon Bill English (until 5 December 2006)
Te Ururoa Flavell
Hon Marian Hobbs (Deputy Chairperson)
Colin King
Moana Mackey (until 7 December 2007)
Allan Peachey
Katherine Rich (from 5 December 2006)
Dianne Yates
Appendix B

The following people or organisations appeared before the committee:

Morrie Abrahams, Principal Opotiki College
Amnesty International
Judge Andrew Becroft, Principal Youth Court Judge
Professor Russell Bishop, University of Waikato
Children’s Health Camps
John Clarke, Deputy Director, Children’s Services, Hampshire, United Kingdom.
The Correspondence School
Professor Terry Crooks, National Education Monitoring Project
Professor Mason Durie, Massey University Education Review Office
Professor Gail Gillon, University of Canterbury
Kay Hawk and Jan Hill, The Education Group
Professor John Hattie, University of Auckland
John Heremia, Te Wharekura Rakaumangamanga
Human Rights Commission
Professor Alister Jones, University of Waikato
Martin Kaipo, Otangarei Youth and Recreation Trust
Dr Kevin Knight, New Zealand Graduate School of Education
Dr John Langley and Lexie Grudnoff, University of Auckland
McGirr Training
Ministry of Education
Ministry of Social Development
New Zealand Qualifications Authority
Porirua City Training Centre
Secondary Futures
Sport Otago
Tū Toa Charitable Trust
Appendix C

Evidence and advice received

AIMHI, *NCEA Achievement Analysis for 2003 and 2004*.

Becroft, Andrew, Submission, 8 August 2007.


Church, John, Submission, 9 October 2006.

Clarke, John, Submission, 30 April 2007.

Correspondence School, Submission,

Counties Manukau District Health Board, *AIMHI Healthy Community Schools*, 2006.


Crooks, Terry, Submission, 2 August 2006.

Denny, Simon; Clark, Terryann; Watson, Peter “The health of alternative education students compared to secondary students: a New Zealand study”, *New Zealand Medical Journal* Vol 117 No 1205, 2004.

Durie, Mason, Submission, 3 August 2006.


Education Review Office, *Achievement of Māori Students in Mainstream Schools*, 2003


Education Review Office, *Schools' Use of Operational Funding December 2006*.


Education Review Office, Submission on standards for student achievement.

Education Review Office, Submission on what schools have learnt from ERO's analysis of their NCEA results, and their responses to underachievement, 22 March 2007.


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Flockton, Lester, Crooks, Terry, and White, Jane, *National Education Monitoring Project, Social Studies Assessment Results 2005*. 

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Hawk, Kay and Hill, Jan, *Towards Making Achievement Cool – Achievement in Multi-Cultural High Schools*, Massey University, 1996.


Knight, Kevin, Submission, 19 September 2007.


Ministry of Education, Submission on the use of Targeted Funding for Educational Achievement, 10 October 2007.


New Zealand Qualifications Authority, presentation on achievement within the National Qualifications Framework, February 2007.

Office of the Clerk, literature review, 12 June 2006.


