Reading and Writing in Years 1 and 2

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Overview

The early years of primary school are a critical time for children. This is when they learn the reading and writing skills they need to engage with all aspects of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. When children start school, each child's literacy experience and knowledge is different. How well this experience and knowledge is recognised and used in their education on a daily basis is, to a large extent, in the hands of their teacher.

This Education Review Office (ERO) evaluation focused on how effectively reading and writing was taught in the first two years of schooling, and on how well teachers used assessment information to plan and evaluate their teaching. ERO was also interested in how school leaders and boards of trustees set and monitored achievement expectations to ensure children were progressing and achieving appropriately, and how this information was shared with parents.

ERO collected evidence for this evaluation from 212 primary schools having an education review during Term 1 and Term 2, 2009. The schools in this study included full primary schools, contributing primary schools and composite schools of varying sizes and deciles in urban and rural locations.

Teaching practices

ERO found that about 70 percent of teachers made good use of a range of effective reading and writing teaching practices in Years 1 and 2 classes. Effective teachers were more likely to inquire into ways of improving their teaching, and work collaboratively with other staff to share good practice. These teachers had a sense of urgency about developing the child as a reader and writer. Their teaching was evidentially based, deliberate and gave children opportunities to practise new skills and knowledge during the instructional classroom programme.

In contrast, the remaining 30 percent of teachers had little or no sense of how critical it was for children to develop confidence and independence in early reading and writing. These teachers had minimal understanding of effective reading and writing teaching, set inappropriately low expectations and did not seek opportunities to extend their own confidence in using a wider range of teaching practices. In these classrooms learning opportunities to motivate, engage or extend children were limited.

Using assessment information

The majority of teachers were good at using assessment to reflect on and improve their teaching of reading and writing. These teachers were adept at using a variety of assessment sources to make judgements about children's literacy progress and achievement. They also applied a 'teaching as inquiry' process to find out what children had already learnt and what changes to make to their teaching, based on what children needed to learn next.

Teachers who did not understand or use reading and writing assessment processes well were more likely to focus on whole-class teaching and activities without a strong

instructional literacy emphasis. They used assessment sporadically and did not use the information gained to reflect on or improve their practice.

Teachers were slightly better at assessing reading than writing. Forty percent made little use of assessment in writing compared to the 33 percent demonstrating limited use of reading assessment. The lack of confidence with assessing and teaching writing in some schools resulted in programmes that were not matched to each child's writing development stage, or were focused on narrow writing opportunities. In some cases this may have resulted from confusion about the use of writing assessment tools, or stemmed from a lack of understanding about how children learn to write.

Improving and monitoring achievement

Although many classroom teachers used assessment information well, school leaders were less clear about how they should use data to set and monitor appropriate reading and writing achievement expectations for children in Years 1 and 2. It is of concern that only about a quarter of school leaders set expectations that strongly promoted high levels of reading and writing achievement for children in their first two years. Furthermore, in nearly two-thirds of schools, leaders used limited or poor processes to monitor the progress and achievement of these young children.

Effective schools set clear, well-founded expectations for achievement in reading and writing that challenged their Years 1 and 2 children to succeed. They based these expectations on data they had collected, and on nationally-referenced assessment information. Staff knew about these expectations and where they fitted with those for later primary schooling. They used reference points at different stages or year levels to follow children's progress.

In the best schools, leaders understood how to use achievement data in their self review. They used their data to inquire into what teaching practices were working, whether these should be modified and where resources were needed to help children who were not succeeding. Leaders were highly involved in managing their own professional learning and development (PLD) through using capable literacy teachers and a range of development and monitoring strategies to support all teachers in the school to enhance their literacy content knowledge and skills.

Boards make many significant investment decisions about resourcing personnel and materials for interventions to support diverse literacy learning needs for Years 1 and 2 children. They need to know how well their investments are working. Where school-review processes were not robust, trustees lacked the necessary information to make or approve these decisions. In effective schools, trustees received valuable information through well-planned evaluation of interventions so they knew what worked best and whether they needed to look at other options.

This report highlights the need for teachers, schools leaders and board members to be clear about their important roles in setting achievement expectations and monitoring how their teaching practices and processes help Years 1 and 2 children to be successful young readers and writers. All children are entitled to explicit and direct teaching in a supportive environment that builds on what they bring when they start school.

Next steps

ERO recommends that school leaders, teachers and trustees use the findings in this report to reflect on the quality of teaching, assessment and monitoring of reading and writing for children in their first two years at school.

In particular, ERO recommends that:

School leaders

- develop their capability to use achievement data from Years 1 and 2 for monitoring and self review;
- give trustees regular information that clearly identifies the extent of underachievement in Years 1 and 2 and outlines strategies to increase children's progress; and
- actively promote and/or lead opportunities for teachers to discuss achievement data and develop their theory and content knowledge to improve teaching for children in Years 1 and 2.

Boards of Trustees

- ensure, where possible, that children in Years 1 and 2 classes are taught by teachers who are knowledgeable and confident in teaching early reading and writing; and
- monitor the impact of interventions on raising student achievement, giving particular regard to the board's significant investment in staffing and resources for Years 1 and 2 children.

Teachers

- participate in ongoing opportunities to extend their understanding of the theory and content knowledge so they are confident in using effective teaching of reading and writing for Years 1 and 2 students; and
- develop their capability in using reference points to monitor children's progress towards expected achievement levels.

The Ministry of Education

- develop writing assessment tools for Years 1 and 2; and
- support beginning teachers so they can confidently use and analyse data from a range of reading and writing assessment tools, and are introduced to a repertoire of teaching approaches that cater for all Years 1 and 2 students' literacy needs.

Introduction

This evaluation of the teaching of reading and writing in the first two years of schooling examines the systems and practices schools use to promote high levels of children's achievement in these two areas of literacy.

National Administration Guideline (NAG) 1 requires each board of trustees, through its principal and staff, to develop and implement teaching and learning programmes, giving priority to student achievement in literacy and numeracy especially in Years 1 to 4 [i(b)]. The NAG also requires, through a range of assessment practices, to gather information that is sufficiently comprehensive to enable the progress and achievement of students to be evaluated giving priority first to student achievement in literacy and numeracy especially in Years 1 to 4 [ii(a)].[1]

Why focus on the early teaching of reading and writing?

Reading and writing are critical skills that enable children to engage with all aspects of *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Children's success in all learning is largely the consequence of effective literacy teaching. Literacy learning builds cumulatively on each learner's existing proficiency. Teachers of Years 1 and 2 have a vital role in getting children off to a good start.

What teachers do, and how well they do it, matters. The quality of teaching can influence the effectiveness of the learner's participation, involvement and achievement. The 2003 *Best Evidence Synthesis* refers to quality of teaching as 'the most influential point of leverage on children's outcomes'.[2] International evidence suggests that quality of teaching and the quality of the learning environment generated by the teacher and the children, is a significant factor in the variance in children's grades (59 percent or higher).[3]

> *Becoming literate is arguably the most important goal of schooling. The ability to read is basic to success in almost every aspect of the school curriculum, it is a prerequisite skill for nearly all jobs, and is the primary key to lifelong learning. Literacy determines, to a large extent, young children's educational and life chances and is fundamental in achieving social justice*.[4]

[1] Note that since this evaluation was undertaken NAG 1 has been revised to give priority to literacy teaching and assessment in Years 1-8 and NAG 2A requires boards to report achievement in Years 1-8 in relation to National Standards. *MOE Circular 2009/12*

[2] Ministry of Education (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse children in schooling: best evidence synthesis.* Wellington: Ministry of Education (p.2).

[3] Ministry of Education (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse children in schooling: best evidence synthesis.* Wellington: Ministry of Education (p.2).

[4] Tunmer, W.E., & Prochnow, J.E. (2009). Cultural relativism and literacy education In Openshaw, R., & Rata, E. (eds). *The politics of conformity in New Zealand* (pp. 154-190). Malaysia: Pearson.

Expectations

Research in the United States indicates a pattern of teachers underestimating and predicting least accurately the responses of low achievers.[5] Reduced expectations of progress and achievement are especially significant in schools serving low-income families. There is also some evidence in New Zealand to suggest this.[6] McNaughton et al[7] found at least some teachers in decile 1 schools set or assume lower levels of reading text progress for the first year of instruction for children in their schools. Similarly, a study of Otara and Mangere schools[8] found examples of teachers having considerably lower expectations of school-related skills than Māori and Pacific children actually had when they entered school.

Although high teacher expectations are important, they are not sufficient on their own to enable children to achieve.[9] Expectations for high standards must be accompanied by good teaching that is mindful of the diverse nature of children's learning needs. Breaking the pattern of inappropriately low expectations for some children (particularly Māori and Pacific, low achievers and those with special learning needs) is at the core of good teaching. Sound evidence of achievement at classroom and school level is crucial. Good teachers know how to use the information from different forms of assessment to create a responsive teaching environment for their children.

Although New Zealand students achieve very well by international standards there is still a wide variance in their achievement. The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS-2005/06) showed that the mean reading score of New Zealand children at Year 5 was higher than the international average. New Zealand has a relatively large group of children that demonstrate advanced reading comprehension skills. However, PIRLS results also highlighted the wide difference between our highest and lowest achieving students. As many as eight percent of children perform at the lowest literacy levels, hence the importance of high quality early teaching.[10]

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[5] Gottfredson, D.C., Birdseye, A.T., Gottfredson, G.D., & Marciniak, E.M. (1995). Increasing teacher expectations for student achievement. *Journal for Educational Research*, 88(3), 155-163

[6] Ministry of Education (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse children in schooling: best evidence synthesis.* Wellington: Ministry of Education.

[7] McNaughton, S., Phillips, G., & MacDonald, S. (2000). Curriculum channels and literacy development over the first year of instruction. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 35(1), 49-59.

[8] Timperley, H., Robinson, V. M. J. & Bullard, T. (1999). *Strengthening education in Mangere and Otara evaluation: first evaluation report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

[9] Ministry of Education (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse children in schooling: best evidence synthesis.* Wellington: Ministry of Education (pp.16, 19).

[10] 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* .

Schools in this study

During Terms 1 and 2, 2009, ERO evaluated the quality of teachers' literacy practices in Years 1 and 2 in 212 schools having an education review. Fifty-two percent of these were full primary schools, 45 percent were contributing primary schools, and the remaining three percent were composite schools. The types of schools, roll size, school locality (urban or rural), and decile ranges of the schools are included in Appendix 1.

Evaluation framework and approach

Two overarching evaluative questions guided this evaluation:

- *How well do teachers assess, plan and teach reading and writing to children in Years 1 and 2?*
- *How well does the school promote and monitor high achievement expectations in reading and writing in Years 1 and 2?*

ERO collected evidence for the two overarching evaluative questions and a set of investigative questions by observing teacher practice, talking with key groups of teachers and senior staff members and looking at school documents relevant to their inquiry. Reviewers used information from discussions, observations and documents to evaluate teachers' professional judgement about the instructional teaching strategies they selected and the confidence they demonstrated with the practices they then used. ERO reviewers recognised that they were not able to see the eventual outcomes resulting from the lesson.

Reviewers recorded their judgements on a separate synthesis sheet and reported to each school in its individual ERO report. The complete evaluation framework, including the investigative questions, is detailed in Appendix 2.

As well as the synthesis sheet, there was a school questionnaire. Reviewers used the information from this questionnaire to scope their evaluation, and responses were aggregated to write this report. Responses were received from 70 percent of the schools in this evaluation and information from these questionnaires supports the findings in this evaluation.

The findings also include extracts from review officers' comments about practice in unidentified schools. These comments show a continuum of practice in the teaching of reading and writing.

The findings in this evaluation are discussed under three sections:

- reading;
- writing; and
- expectations for achievement.

Findings

Reading

The skilful use of instructional teaching, using different methods and contexts, is essential in the teaching of both reading and writing. Each child starting school comes from different social settings, has already developed varying literacy perspectives and is likely to progress through differing routes from his or her peers. Therefore, teachers need an in-depth understanding of the theories and content knowledge they can use for each of those children to learn to read and write successfully.

Effective teaching is complemented by regular and systematic assessments that allow teachers to make overall judgements about how children achieve and progress. The information gained from assessment helps teachers to focus their teaching on the learning needs of individuals and groups of children. This may require alterations to the way they teach or changes to the resources used in their teaching. Assessment information can also influence the expectations teachers have of and for children, and can help them to involve both children and parents in the learning process.

In this evaluation, ERO considered the following questions when making judgements about how well teachers of Years 1 and 2 managed their reading programmes. The key focus questions were:

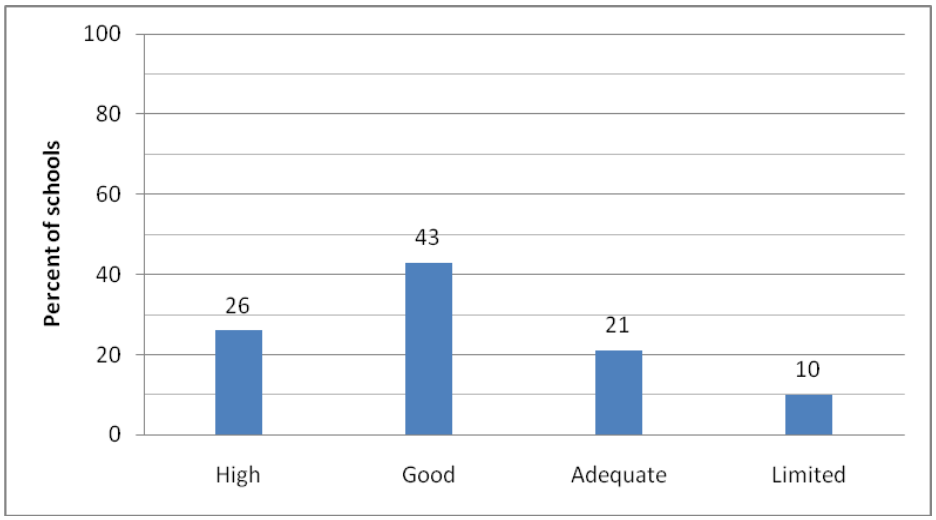
- How well do teachers in Years 1 and 2 classes use reading assessments to inform their teaching?
- How well do teachers in Years 1 and 2 classes use instructional teaching strategies in their classrooms?
- What is the overall quality of teaching of reading in Years 1 and 2 classes?

The overall quality of teaching of reading in Years 1 and 2

ERO found a wide range in the quality of reading teaching across and within some schools. Many children benefited from the highest quality teaching that enabled them to achieve to the advanced reading levels shown in New Zealand's PIRLs results. However, in some classes, poor quality teaching disadvantaged children who therefore did not develop or acquire essential early reading knowledge and skills.

Figure 1 shows that the overall quality of the teaching of reading in Years 1 and 2 was either high or good quality in 69 percent of the schools. There was a considerable difference in the quality of the teaching of reading in nearly a third of the remaining schools. In 21 percent of schools the quality of the reading programme was adequate, and in the remaining 10 percent it was limited.

Figure 1: Overall quality of teaching of reading



Using reading assessments in Years 1 and 2 to inform teaching

Effective reading assessment involves the process of collecting, analysing and using information about what children know and can do. Teachers with rich information about children's reading knowledge and skills can actively involve them in their learning by helping them understand what they need to do next to progress. They can also collect or share assessment information with parents and whānau to help children's reading at home.

Teachers collect information about how well their children are doing in different ways. Sometimes this is informal and constructive in supporting immediate learning needs. Most often it is planned and systematic. To be effective, teachers need to be clear about which assessment tools they need, and how they can best use these to help them plan for, and monitor, children's achievement and progress.

ERO asked how well teachers used their reading assessments to help teach reading.

Figure 2: Teachers' use of reading assessment to inform teaching

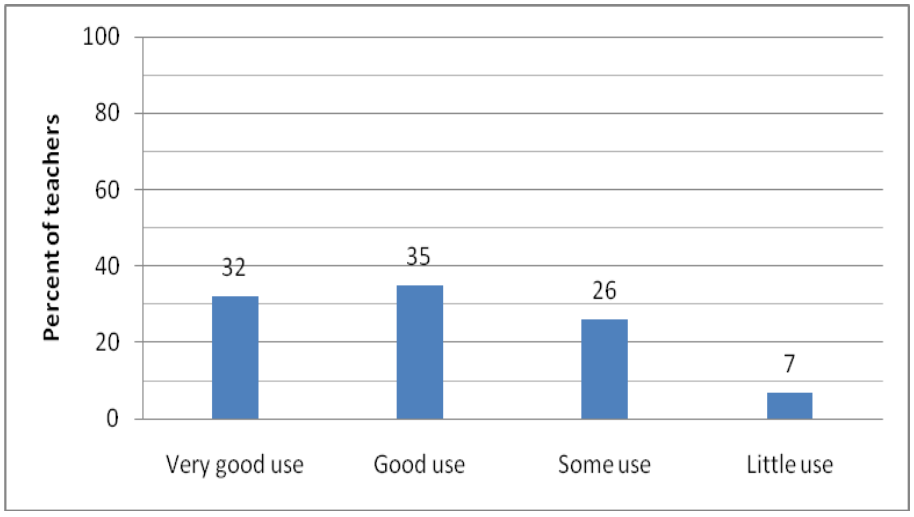


Figure 2 shows that teachers in just over two-thirds of schools made good or very good use of their assessments to plan and evaluate reading programmes, and share

information with parents and children. This result compares favourably with ERO's March 2007 report *The Collection and Use of Assessment Information in Schools*[11] which found 52 percent of schools used assessments to guide teaching and learning. Just over a quarter of schools made some use of assessments they collected, while seven percent made little use of the reading data.

What was working well in schools

In effective schools teachers discussed achievement data together and used it to reflect on how well children were progressing. These regular discussions, as a team or whole-school staff, helped them identify rates of progress and examine and share the teaching practices used to bring about improvements. Formal team or syndicate reflection also helped teachers focus on children needing extra support or to highlight the need to modify aspects of the teaching programme. Teachers were successfully using the 'Teaching as Inquiry' process[12] to discuss the effectiveness of their teaching.

Good data analysis and interpretation helped teachers decide on teaching objectives, set group and individual learning goals, and identify specific reading behaviours to focus on. Teachers used additional, or more specific, assessments to focus on children who were not making expected progress. They targeted additional instruction and monitoring for these children. Formal assessments were often accompanied by teachers' anecdotal jottings and observations about significant needs or successes observed during a lesson.

Data was used to form instructional reading groups that were flexible enough to cater for children's changing levels of progress and learning needs. Teachers combined data from formal assessments with judgements made during daily reading instruction to decide on, or modify, specific teaching practices.

Both teachers and school leaders had a sense of urgency about increasing children's abilities to develop as a reader. In some schools, records from early childhood education were taken into account and additional assessments undertaken as part of the transition to school. In other cases formal assessments were collected as soon as possible after the children started school, and repeated at six months, and then a year later, to make comparisons and highlight the next development steps.

Teachers represented graphically how they chose to monitor each individual child's mastery of reading levels. Diagnostic Observation Survey (six-year net) results were thoroughly analysed to identify the teaching practices making the most difference and, adjust programmes where necessary.

Professional development increased teachers' assessment capability and confidence. Some schools sought help from external professional development providers. In many cases they identified a literacy leader in their school, with particular expertise and gave additional time for this lead person to work with teachers at a team or

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[11] To access this report please visit http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Reports+-+National+Reports

[12] Ministry of Education (2007). *Quality The New Zealand curriculum.* Wellington: Ministry of Education (p.35).

school-wide level for improvement. In some schools, teachers learned together through sharing and reflecting on a range of professional literature including *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4.*[13] Teachers' appraisal goals were linked to agreed outcomes from professional development, or were selected to align with school targets focused on improving children's reading achievement.

Teachers recognised the need for, and actively encouraged, learning partnerships with children and parents. They made learning explicit to both children and parents by discussing learning goals and expected outcomes and the criteria by which children could achieve success. Teachers made good use of modelling books, children's portfolios and daily notebooks.

Parents were invited to the school to discuss and set goals based on information collected from school entry tests, the six-year net and other assessments. As part of formal reporting, parents and families were given accurate information about their child's reading levels. This was often accompanied by an outline of what they needed to achieve next. Daily notebooks explained ideas parents could use to support their child and provided information to help them track progress. Parents were well informed about their child's reading achievement and progress.

Examples of using reading assessment effectively

Composite school, urban, large, middle decile:
Years 1 and 2 teachers have worked together with other junior staff to develop an agreed approach to collecting and using assessments. An assessment schedule is closely followed. A new-entrant check, one month after the child starts school is used to assesses the child's knowledge of any sight words, alphabet names and sounds, their understanding of concepts about print, and how well they listen and speak. Reading running records are analysed to show children's progress through the book levels and the skills they are using well, or need to practise more.

Contributing primary, rural, medium size, high decile:
Teachers gather and share data with each other to increase their overall knowledge of the children. They use the information to decide which children need one-to-one teaching or extra small group teaching sessions in the classroom. These small group sessions focus on children's development of strategies for decoding text, reading fluently, exploring meaning and increasing vocabulary. Targeted children have individual reading plans and these are shared with other teachers in the syndicate and with parents. The plans are well monitored and reviewed as children master their developing skills.

What was not working well

Less effective teachers kept sporadic or incomplete reading assessments. These were often collected by someone other than the classroom teacher and not shared with or used by the teacher to assist with their day-to-day teaching. Assessments were often limited to testing children's mastery of word lists or their ability to name the letters of the alphabet, and were unlikely to contribute to a rich reading programme. Teachers either undertook few running records of reading, or did not use them as a diagnostic tool. Where they were used, it was usually to identify the children's reading level. No processes were in place to highlight progress over time. Infrequent or poorly used formal assessments meant some children were given text that was too difficult or not challenging enough for them to read and understand.

[13] Ministry of Education (2003). *Effective literacy practice in years 1 to 4.* Wellington: Learning Media.

Assessments were not always used to plan for differentiated learning needs or levels. Some teachers collected data about knowledge of letter sounds and names but then involved all children in 'letter of the week' activities, despite data indicating that some children already knew the letters well. Similarly, the practice of having every child learn the actions and sounds for letters in commercially-produced phonics programmes ignored children's letter-sound knowledge and bored those ready to attempt more advanced reading skills. Some teachers used supplementary worksheet activities with no links to assessed or identified needs. Whole-class teaching, for the entire reading lesson, highlighted some teachers' limited understanding of the use of assessment data and the rationale for it.

Assessment findings were not always discussed with parents or children. Children's portfolios sometimes included reading samples, but had little or no additional information parents could use to identify their child's progress or what they were expected to be learning. Reports provided only general comments about children's levels of enjoyment, attitudes or reading behaviour. Some report and interview comments were made without reference to recent assessments. Although parents had many informal opportunities to find out about their child's reading, some did not know about their child's achievement or progress. Children's lack of awareness about their progress, and/or how they could improve, reduced motivation and enthusiasm for reading.

Some teachers worked in isolation without having the opportunity to share or discuss reading achievement and teaching practices with others. A lack of collaborative discussion about reading assessments resulted in variability in the quality of reading programmes evident across the junior classes.

Size made it difficult for very small schools to share assessment information. In these schools the junior teacher often worked in relative isolation. However ERO found some small schools where assessments were reflected on and used to improve teaching. These teachers found ways to discuss children's reading assessments with a teacher in the senior school or the principal release teacher to encourage more collaborative decision making.

Examples of where reading assessments were not used well

Contributing primary, urban, small, high decile:
Reading running records are undertaken at on a termly basis and results about reading level and accuracy are recorded in class roll books. Running records are not used to identify ways that the children may have used to work out words and sentences, and make sense of the text. One of the three Years 1 and 2 teachers plots her class results on a graph to track the reading levels. At an unspecified time after school entry, children's concepts about print (CAP) are tested, but this test is not carried out or used by the class teacher. The six-year net scores are filed in the relevant file by the Reading Recovery teacher and are only used to identify possible candidates for Reading Recovery.

Contributing primary, urban, medium size, low decile:
Staff had some external professional development in 2007 to assist them in administering and using running records. No additional running record professional development has occurred since then to help teachers develop their skills, despite new staff teaching in the junior syndicate (some without junior experience). Running records are analysed to find the suggested reading level for each child. However, variability between classes is evident in the quality of analysis of the data and the interpretation of children's strengths and needs. Data for children in 2008 was inaccurate. Children were assessed at much lower levels than they were actually achieving. This poor assessment limited the progress children made in the following year.

What were teachers using to assess reading?

Ninety-nine percent of the schools that completed ERO's school questionnaire used running records to observe reading behaviours and monitor rates of progress. Ninety-two percent used the six-year-net tests to gather information about children after a year at school. Sixty-five percent were using some type of assessment procedure before the children started school or within the first month. Some designed their own literacy tests, modified parts of School Entry Assessment (SEA) or were using the Observation Survey and comparing results with the norms for five-year-old children.

Teachers used a range of other informal and formal assessments to identify children's knowledge of letter names and sounds, decoding skills, reading comprehension and oral language. Other assessment tools cited by schools for use with Years 1 and 2 in assessing reading included:

- information from the child's early childhood education portfolio;
- high frequency word-sight word lists;
- BURT word reading test;
- Supplementary Test of Achievement in Reading (STAR);[14]
- Abecedarian Reading Assessment;
- Joy Allcock Phonological Awareness;
- Performance Indicators in Primary School (PIPS);
- Jolly Phonics assessments;
- Perceptual Motor Programme (PMP) assessments;
- Rainbow Reading assessments;
- phonemic awareness tests;
- 'Chunk Check Cheer' test;
- New Zealand Basic Word test;
- Korakonui Sight Words;
- TALES (oral language test);
- Pseudoword Test;

[14] A locally-normed version of a test usually intended for use at Years 3 to 6.

- Phonological Awareness Screening test;
- McCarthy and Kirk test;
- Cloze tests; and
- Junior Oral Language screening tool (JOST).

Using instructional reading strategies in the classroom

Effective teachers create a learning environment that is positive, responsive to the needs of diverse children and focused on success. They have a passion for reading that is reflected in how they teach, how they involve children in their learning and the interesting and motivating literacy activities they provide. Their interactions with children and their moment-by-moment decisions and actions are critical influences, in the quality of children's learning.

Effective teachers know about successful methods for teaching reading and how to modify or change these when necessary. They also recognise that effective teaching requires deliberate instruction, balanced with opportunities for children to use the skills they have learnt by providing time to read for enjoyment, and to learn across the curriculum.

The amount of time spent on reading programmes varied across the schools that completed the questionnaire. Fifty-seven percent of schools allocated between three and six hours a week for Year 1 children's reading, and 64 percent gave the same amount of time to reading for Year 2 children. In both year groups 23 percent of schools spent more than six hours a week on reading programmes. It was difficult to find out how much time was spent on instructional teaching compared to reading related activities.

In investigating the use of instructional reading strategies, ERO considered how well teachers:

- decided on and used instructional reading strategies to meet children's identified needs and interests; and
- engaged their children in reading.

Children took part in regularly timetabled reading lessons in all of the schools. In most classes a structured programme included components such as guided reading lessons, shared reading opportunities and a variety of independent activities. In some classes, parent helpers and teacher aides assisted children in independent and group activities.

Figure 3: Teachers' use of instructional reading strategies

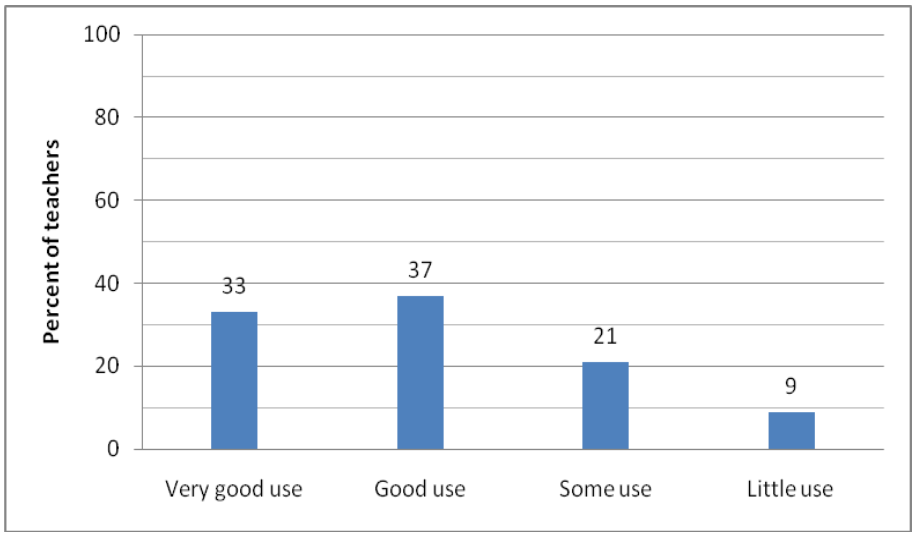

Figure 3 shows that high quality teaching of reading was observed in a third of the schools. In a further 37 percent, teachers made good use of instructional reading strategies within their classrooms. Twenty-one percent made some use of instructional strategies and nine percent demonstrated little confidence with the teaching of reading. The quality and range of instructional reading strategies varied between and within schools.

What was working well in schools

Lessons and activities were based on the diagnosed needs of individuals and groups of children. Lead teachers and or school leaders shared and discussed ideas, instances and effective strategies. They read literature about best teaching practice and discussed these aspects together. Teachers with reading expertise modelled effective practice and mentored colleagues to develop their confidence in using an increasing set of teaching strategies.

Many teachers were highly enthusiastic and displayed a sense of excitement about reading. They combined approaches such as whole language, emphasising meaning and strategy instruction, and phonics-based methods of teaching to cater for their children's diverse needs. They decided on the appropriateness of their method of teaching based on their diagnoses of children's needs. Teachers encouraged children's curiosity about the pictures, text, stories and ideas in their reading books.

Teachers demonstrated an extensive repertoire of reading strategies and an awareness of the knowledge and skills children need to develop as successful readers. They encouraged children's enjoyment of, and interest in rhyme, rhythm and humour to capture their interest and help them understand word patterns. Teachers used effective questioning to help children's oral language development. They encouraged them to share ideas, increase their understanding of what they were reading, and explore the meaning of new words. They provided children with opportunities to re-read known stories independently or with their buddies.

Children knew what the lesson was about. Teachers made this clear to them and revisited the purpose and goals during the lesson or activity. Modelling books were used to highlight the learning focus and reading behaviour children would use to

succeed. Teachers recognised a teachable moment and responded to learning needs as they arose. Follow-up or response activities were carefully selected to help children practise the skills focused on during the guided reading lesson.

Well-paced lessons helped children to maintain enthusiasm for the learning task and successfully complete selected activities. Teachers ensured that children were reading, or using print, during every moment of the reading lesson. Children had plentiful and appropriately levelled texts in their reading boxes, big books, poetry cards, reading games and in class and school libraries. In addition children had supporting activities such as letter and word games, and used technology that involved reading, viewing and listening. Displayed reading goals, modelling books and task boards gave visual prompts encouraging children to read or use print independently while the teacher was involved with other groups of children.

Teachers communicated effectively with other adults who helped children during reading programmes. Parent helpers or teacher aides were given focused training from the class teacher or literacy leaders. Adult helpers roved among groups to take part in word games, hear individual children read and help those still developing their independence. Some teacher aides skilfully led guided reading lessons so that children had frequent opportunities to explore and discuss texts with an adult. Regular communication between teachers, parent helpers and teacher aides ensured that all parties clearly understood how they could assist children with their reading goals.

Examples of effective use of reading strategies

Contributing primary, urban, medium size, high decile:
Teacher planning and programmes show teachers using deliberate acts of teaching through modelling, prompting, questioning, giving feedback, telling, explaining and directing. Teachers identify the learning focus for children to give them opportunities to read, search, make predictions, cross check or confirm their ideas, self correct and fully understand text. Learning intentions are constantly shared and discussed with children who are then given many opportunities to practise the newly introduced skills.

Contributing primary, urban, large, medium decile:
Teachers structure guided reading lessons to improve children's decoding, reading comprehension and fluency. Teaching includes such features as poetry and rhyme concepts, reading at listening posts, reading from book boxes and texts displayed around the room, alphabet matching, and sequencing pictures from a story. Children use big books, shared books, poetry and rhymes to encourage oral language development and confidence with decoding words with similar sound patterns. Texts are appropriately levelled and selected so children's prior knowledge and interests are used to encourage in-depth discussions about the likely content and meaning of the books they read.

What was not working well

A lack of confidence in use of instructional reading strategies limited some teachers' ability to implement a variety of teaching methods. In some instances, inexperienced literacy teachers new to the school were given responsibility for teaching in the critical Years 1 and 2 class levels, despite the fact that other teachers in the school had recently completed extensive literacy PLD. Beginning teachers, still effectively in training, were also given charge of junior children's reading programmes. Teachers were often not given time to share effective teaching strategies or resources during syndicate or staff meetings. As a result they were not fully aware of the range of junior school texts or strategies they could use.

Reading programmes and materials in some classes were not well linked to children's needs or interests. Whole-class teaching for the entire lesson meant children were not given targeted reading opportunities at their level. In some instances, they had no formal instructional reading and mainly participated in independent activities or unstructured one-to-one reading with the teacher. In some cases children read aloud around the group or participated in 'echo reading', where they read back a passage the teacher had just read to them. While these examples involve children in reading, they highlight a lack of understanding about effective instructional reading practice and give the children little more than an activity to fill time.

Ineffective teachers did not plan specifically for instructional teaching by matching the activities to the children's identified needs. Planning notes usually included the names of the text for each group without outlining a specific teaching focus to target an observed reading behaviour. Teachers' decisions about the strategies to use during the lesson were made entirely 'on-the-run' with no opportunities to respond to learning needs in a carefully considered manner. In some group lessons children were introduced to a considerable array of ideas but given little time to embed or practise new skills before being introduced to another focus. Follow-up tasks often bore no link to the teaching session and did not provide a chance to use the knowledge gained during the lesson.

Problems with effective classroom management limited some teachers' ability to implement a high-quality reading programme. Teachers attempted to work with each of their six or seven reading groups every day. The small amount of time spent with each group limited children's opportunities to discuss and understand the text or practise any new skills introduced to them. Teachers set independent activities (like colouring in worksheets or using blocks for construction) that involved no reading and were chosen to keep children busy while they endeavoured to manage all of their groups. The activities were not literacy-based and lacked sufficient challenge for the more capable children. Poor behaviour, resulting from a lack of interest or motivation, caused disruption to other children's learning.

Examples of ineffective teaching of reading strategies

Contributing primary, urban, small, low decile:
The reading programme is based entirely on Jolly Phonics, Talk to Learn and letter-sound knowledge activities. The teacher has little knowledge of other instructional reading strategies.

Contributing primary, rural, small, medium decile:
In one class, where children achieve at a wide range of reading levels, all take part in one guided reading lesson irrespective of their abilities. They focus on the picture, sound out words, and try to work out what happens next in the story. The teacher then hears individual children read and talks to the children about any errors she notices. In the other class all children sound out vowel sounds, initial sounds and high frequency words together whether they know them or not. Then they work in small groups where they take turns to read aloud to the teacher, practise sounding out words and use pictures to help solve new words. In both classes the lesson has a narrow focus on only a small number of children's reading levels and abilities.

Professional learning and development teachers had engaged in to support instructional reading programmes

Sixty-two percent of the schools that completed the school questionnaire had participated in some type of professional learning and development (PLD) in reading during 2007 and/or 2008. The period of time given to PLD in reading varied considerably. In some cases the PLD had been undertaken for a year or more or for a school term, while in other instances teachers may have attended one seminar, a conference or one staff meeting where reading was discussed. Table 1 shows the main types of PLD that schools reported their teachers had undertaken.

Table 1: Professional learning and development in reading

Professional learning and development activity	2008	2007
General literacy	32%	29%
Reading Recovery (targeted)	13%	5%
General reading	14%	9%
Literacy Progressions	11%	1%
Phonics	12%	15%
AToL[15] reading focus	7%	5%
Running records	6%	2%
Literacy Lead Teacher	5%	2%
Analysis of data	1%	-
Dyslexia/reading disability	1%	-
Early literacy	1%	2%

General literacy included Ministry of Education PLD contracts that focused on both reading and writing. Resource teachers: literacy (RT:Lit), Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Literacy Development Officers and literacy advisors were also used to lead PLD in general reading developments. This category also included schools where teachers had worked together to become familiar with using the strategies or assessments outlined in the draft Literacy Learning Progressions[16] and Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4.

General reading PLD included using assessment to plan programmes, guided or shared reading, or lead teachers participating in university study focused on the teaching of reading.

[15] Assessment To Learn.
[16] Ministry of Education, (2007). *Literacy learning progressions (draft for consultation).* Wellington: Learning Media.

Writing

Beginning writers need a variety of opportunities to encourage them to write about their ideas and experiences. Children's writing development is likely to be enhanced through planned and effective teaching that enable them to use a variety of personal, social and instructional purposes for their writing. These experiences help young learners to make sense of the world through discussing and sharing real life experiences that then lead them to write for different audiences.

In making a judgement about how well teachers of Years 1 and 2 managed writing programmes, ERO evaluated:

- how well teachers in Years 1 and 2 classrooms used writing assessments to inform their teaching;
- how well teachers in Years 1 and 2 classrooms used instructional writing strategies in their teaching; and
- the overall quality of teaching of writing in Years 1 and 2 classes.

The overall quality of teaching of writing in Years 1 and 2

ERO found that many teachers demonstrated knowledge of the processes and features of writing. They regularly provided highly motivating opportunities for children to develop and enjoy their writing. However, some of these same teachers were not confident with assessing achievement or progress in writing, and using the information to respond to individual children's needs.

Figure 4: Overall quality of teaching of writing

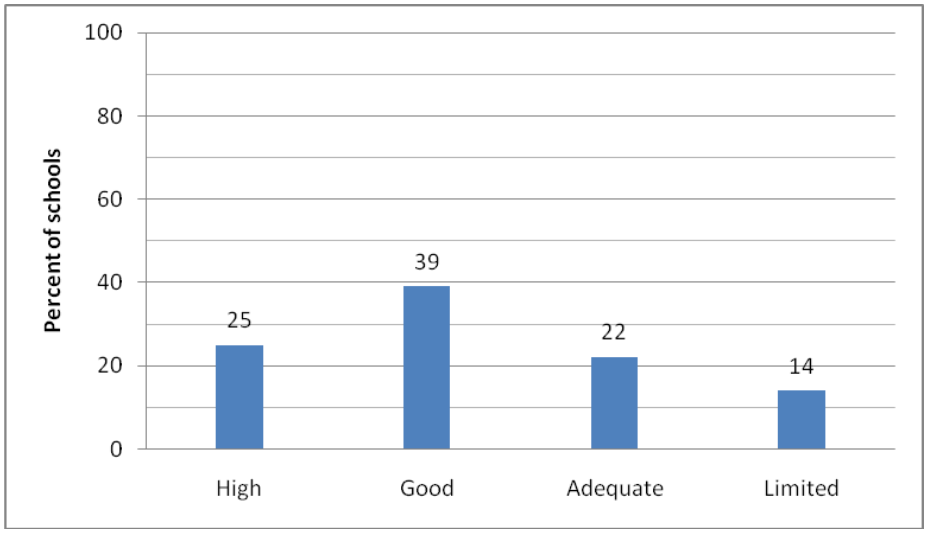

Figure 4 shows that the overall quality of teaching was high in 25 percent of the schools. Thirty-nine percent had good quality writing programmes. In 22 percent of schools the teaching of writing was adequate, while in 14 percent teachers had limited understanding about effective writing programmes and the quality of their teaching suffered.

Using writing assessments to inform teaching

Teachers need to know how well children are developing their skills and confidence as writers to form words and sentences, create meaning and engage their audiences. They are more likely to make accurate judgements about children's progress and achievement when they gather assessment from various sources.

Teachers also need a thorough understanding of what is expected of children as they move through their first years at school. They use this information as reference points in order to make judgements about how well a child is progressing towards an expected target and whether their progress is appropriate. Reference points help to shape the writing expectations teachers will have for their children in the first two years of school. Together with their knowledge of the children's learning needs gained from various assessments, teachers' judgements influence what and how they teach the child.

ERO found more variability in schools' expectations about collecting and using writing assessments than in reading. In most schools teachers were expected to assess children's writing formally. However, in a small number, no formal writing assessments were collected or used to decide what to teach. At the time of the evaluation many teachers were participating in professional development to increase their capability in assessing writing.

Figure 5: Teachers' use of assessments in writing

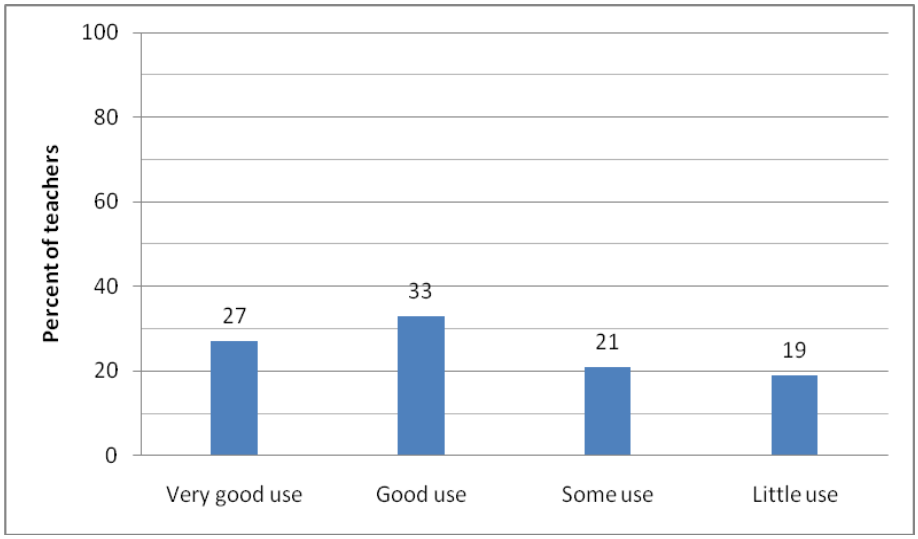

Figure 5 shows that teachers in 60 percent of schools either made very good or good use of writing assessments for teaching decisions and sharing information with children and parents. Teachers at 21 percent of schools adequately used assessments for their writing programmes, while 19 percent made limited use of writing assessments.

What was working well in schools

Recent involvement in professional development for writing had helped teachers make more accurate judgements about their children's writing. School literacy leaders or external facilitators encouraged teachers to take advantage of Ministry of Education resources including *The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars*[17], the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* and the handbook *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4*.

Where schools managed their own literacy development, teachers had been encouraged to share research and literature about effective writing practice. Lead teachers then led syndicate or team discussions about how new practices might be included in their classroom programmes. They observed each other's teaching to suggest improvements and shared successful teaching approaches. The quality of discussion, reflection and learning resulting from professional learning and development had a positive effect in helping teachers develop confidence about determining children's achievement and progress in writing.

In effective schools, teachers worked together, across the school or in clusters with other schools, to critically analyse writing samples. Assessments were analysed to identify what children had mastered and what their next learning steps would be. The information was also used to identify and group together children with similar learning needs. Team, school or cluster meetings provided time for teachers to reflect on, and discuss, practices that encouraged children to progress as writers. Teachers met regularly to moderate each others' professional judgements about children's unassisted writing samples. Moderation of writing samples gave teachers useful opportunities to talk about different ways and stages children develop their writing.

Assessment information was used to respond to individual children's needs. Although teachers' planning often identified a class-wide writing purpose, individual children's goals or group learning intentions were carefully matched to their needs. Teachers shared the moderated writing sample with each child and discussed their next goal with them. Each group or individual child had writing goals recorded in their exercise books. These goals were referred to and monitored through regular teacher-children conferences, and were formally reflected on at the end of each term before setting new goals. Classroom displays highlighted examples of children's work that successfully showed writing features described in their goals.

Teachers understood what was expected of children during their first two years at school. They could reference the writing stages, behaviours and skills children were developing, to well known and understood exemplars or benchmarks. Many effective schools were using the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions* and *The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* as their reference points for children's achievement.

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[17] Ministry of Education, *The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars*, Learning Media and the Learning Centre Trust of New Zealand, Wellington, 2003, accessible at http://www.tki.org.nz/r/assessment/exemplars/eng/index_e.php

Families were given accurate and useful information about their children's achievement in writing. Collections of individual children's writing samples were shared to help them and their parents reflect on their goals or objectives, and recognise or celebrate the progress made. Samples of writing, sent home to parents, included teachers' comments about the child's level of achievement, the skills they had mastered and what they should focus on next. Children explained their progress with their goals during three-way conferencing held as part of parent interviews. Families sometimes provided written feedback about their child's writing progress and success. Children were well aware of what they had done well and how they could improve their writing.

Examples of effective use of writing assessments

Composite school, urban, large, middle decile
Profiles sent home regularly for parents include analysed writing samples of different types of writing genre. These clearly outline school writing achievement expectations for the end of Years 1 and 2. Children work with the teacher to set goals in writing. These are reviewed each term and included in the profile. Reports on children's progress and achievement and three-way parent/children/teacher interviews give parents information about their child's progress in writing. Children know the strategies they need to develop as teachers talk to them about what they are expected to learn in the lesson and how they can use their new skills successfully. These ideas are reinforced throughout the writing lesson and are used by children at the end of the lesson to help them see how well they are applying new skills.

Full primary, rural, small, high decile
The teaching principal has a good understanding of writing programmes and writing assessment. She has a clear rationale for the use of exemplars and individual interviews for assessment. She analyses and interprets assessment information to determine each child's writing levels, progress, next learning steps and to group children with similar learning needs. Children's emerging skills are well monitored and writing tasks match their learning needs. Children's individual's goals reflect what they will next aim for in their learning from what has been identified in assessments. High quality information about each child's learning needs and progress is shared with children and parents, and the significance of the data is fully explained. Children are involved in parent teacher interviews and know about their progress. Goals for improvement are set together.

What was not working well

Although schools had national guidelines about how to assess writing, in ineffective schools teachers had no school expectations about when or how often assessments should occur. In some schools, Years 1 and 2 children's writing was not assessed formally. In other instances assessments were used to identify what the child could do without using the information as a basis to plan future programmes.

School-developed writing expectations included only a few of the features of writing expected of children in the first years of school. Teachers were, instead, encouraged to concentrate entirely on how well children used capital letters and full stops or how neatly work was presented. This limited teachers' ability to focus on the other critical writing features and processes to which Years 1 and 2 children should be introduced.

Some teachers were still developing their confidence in the use of a writing matrix or in moderating their judgements about children's writing. The practice of a teacher always assessing children's writing on their own relied largely on what knowledge the teacher had acquired. Some did not have a strong understanding of the different writing features and were, therefore, unable to decide accurately what children had mastered or what they should focus on next. A lack of, or poor, moderation

procedures resulted in some children being assessed at the wrong levels and these having to be adjusted when the child moved into the next class. Teachers had limited understanding about appropriate levels or writing progressions because they weren't using the reference points to set their achievement expectations or make judgements.

Writing assessments in some schools were used only to report levels of achievement school-wide or report on how a child had progressed recently. Results were sent to a school leader to collate, enter into the school's computerised student management system and, in some cases, report overall school-wide achievement patterns to the board. Teachers were given no opportunity to collaboratively reflect on the collated data to decide whether previous changes in teaching practice were successful or future adjustments were necessary.

Ineffective programmes were planned to match a particular writing context, purpose or feature without any clear links to assessment information. School writing plans indicated the activity teachers should give priority to without regard for children's actual needs. Programmes were organised to ensure children had equal amounts of time to concentrate on each particular type of writing. This system limited beginning writers' opportunities to write expressively about something meaningful to them that matched their learning need.

In some classes assessments were only used to develop one teaching point that was likely to be the one skill many of the children in the class needed to develop. This practice meant some children were introduced to concepts they were not ready for, or those they had already mastered. Many children were not taught the writing features they specifically needed to focus on to progress to their next writing development stage.

Children and their families at some schools were not aware of what the child should do to improve in writing. Children received superficial feedback comments in their books or writing portfolios that mainly praised effort and neatness. Although teachers reported sharing lots of information with parents on an informal basis, they had no process to ensure all parents were fully aware of their child's writing levels or progress. Samples of writing sent home to families had no evaluative comments from the teacher. This made it difficult for parents to understand what was expected of their child or how to help their writing at home.

Examples of ineffective use of writing assessment

Full primary, rural, small, high decile
There is no evidence of the teacher using any assessment, either formal or informal, to evaluate the effectiveness of writing programmes or children's achievement. The teacher has limited understanding of writing development steps. Limited examples of writing are included in children's learning profiles. The class focus is on handwriting, spelling, and letter-sound knowledge. Children are unable to talk about how they can improve their writing.

Special school, urban, small, low decile
There is no formal assessment of writing in the first years. Written comments are only recorded about the neatness of colouring in. Children are not grouped according to their learning needs. Instead they take part in a 'one-size-fits-all' experience loosely targeted at a 'junior age' class level and based on what the teacher thinks might interest these children.

Assessment tools used for Years 1 and 2 writing

Schools were using a considerable variety of assessments and tools to find out about aspects of their children's writing. These included the English matrix from *The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* or a similar matrix designed by literacy PLD facilitators for use in schools that were using Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) writing levels.[18] Teachers also had writing conferences with children when marking their work.

Other assessments and tools schools identified focused mainly on spelling, and word and letter formation. Spelling assessments included:

- The Essential Spelling Lists;
- Vernon Essential Skills;
- Schonell test;
- Daniels and Diack test;
- Korakonui Spelling;
- Peters Spelling;
- School-based weekly spelling lists; and
- Joy Allcock formative spelling assessments.

Some schools also included other items such as: information from the child's early childhood portfolio; 'the words I know' writing check; Wordpower; 10 minute writing samples, pre and post test writing samples; and a knowledge of genre requirements assessment.

Using instructional teaching strategies in the classroom

Children need a wide variety of experiences to motivate and engage them so they enjoy writing. Teachers play a critical role in developing their classroom as a place where children take an active part in their learning, and have plenty of opportunities to share their experiences in an inclusive, non-discriminatory and cohesive environment.

Effective teachers know about successful strategies for teaching writing. They know how to modify or change their teaching practices when necessary. They recognise that effective teaching requires deliberate instruction balanced with opportunities for children to experiment with writing for different purposes and audiences.

Effective teachers also understand how important it is for children to know what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how they can use their new skills. In particular teachers should structure learning experiences that help children draw on oral language and enable them to transfer words encountered in speaking and reading, into their writing.

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[18] asTTle writing levels information is accessible at http://www.tki.org.nz/r/asttle/user/writing-tuhituhi-ex_e.php

Sixty-eight percent of the schools that completed the questionnaire allocated between three and six hours a week for Year 1 writing programmes and 71 percent allocated that same amount of time to Year 2 writing programmes. More time was given to writing than for reading programmes. Eight percent of the schools, Year 1 classes spent more than six hours a week on writing and 10 percent provided Year 2 children writing time for more than six hours a week. It was difficult to find out how much time was spent on instructional teaching compared to writing related activities.

In investigating the use of instructional teaching strategies for writing, ERO considered how well teachers:

- decided on and used instructional writing strategies to meet the identified needs and interests of the children; and
- engaged their children in writing.

ERO found that many schools had clearly stated teaching guidelines for when and how writing was taught. Most schools gave children regular opportunities to develop their writing. Teachers generally used a range of ways to motivate children before they began to write. Teaching often skilfully highlighted the links between reading, speaking and writing.

Figure 6: Teachers' use of instructional writing strategies

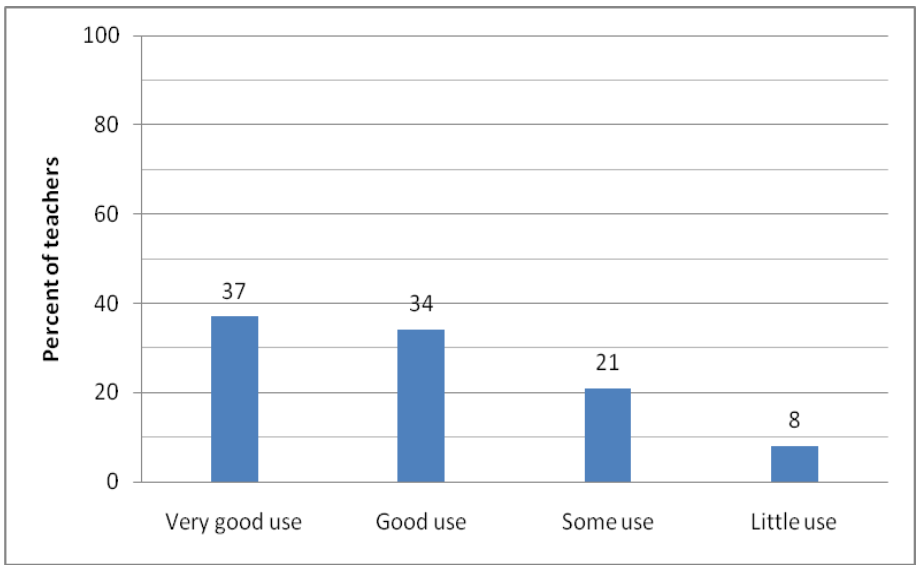


Figure 6 shows that teachers in 71 percent of schools used a very good or good range of strategies to engage their children in writing. Twenty-one percent of schools used some effective teaching strategies, while eight percent had few strategies likely to improve children's writing development.

What was working well in schools

Effective teachers gave children a purpose for writing and encouraged them to write about things and experiences they were likely to be familiar with. They used objects, artefacts, books, and visual images to motivate children to write. They also showed photographs or computer images of events and occasions, and learning activities or discoveries children had previously been involved in and could talk and write about. As part of writing motivation, teachers used big books and texts used during shared reading to reinforce how reading and writing are linked. Children could sometimes make choices about what they wanted to write about and were given many opportunities to write independently.

Oral language activities promoted discussion about ideas and helped children to talk about what they wanted to say before they wrote. Effective questioning by the teacher encouraged children to think more deeply and clarify their thoughts before planning their writing. Children talked about the likely content of their stories with buddies or in small groups before they began writing. Teachers immediately reinforced children's suggestions when they offered interesting or exciting words. Introductory discussions were carefully timed to ensure children were motivated and did not sit for too long. Teachers showed interest and enthusiasm in children's ideas and writing.

Children were given ways to improve their writing. During shared writing sessions, teachers modelled language features by writing together with individuals or groups. They carefully broke down the skills children were expected to focus on. This helped children to understand what they were learning to do and what they should be looking for in their writing. When modelling, teachers used contexts suggested by children to show how their ideas were valued. Children were taught to use diagrams, charts and pictures to plan their own writing. They could talk about the skills they were focusing on and how they could improve.

Good classroom management made time available for teachers to support individual writers. They managed time with small groups of children who needed additional help or extension. Teachers roved around the class reinforcing children's success with the language features or writing skills focused on in the lesson. They had conversations with individual children to help them further refine or expand their ideas, help them edit their work, and highlight their success and progress.

Teachers provided many opportunities for children to assess their own learning. Children were carefully taught how to reflect on their own work and were skilled at helping peers critique their writing. They used such things as '*I Can'* or '*My Goals'* sheets to help them assess progress against their individual goals. They also highlighted where they had used the effective writing features in their work. Time was given to share their writing with, and receive oral feedback, from others. This helped children recognise they were writing for an audience. They confidently regulated and monitored their own progress.

There was ample support for and celebration of children's developing writing in the classroom. Writing was valued and presented on classroom walls. Word cards and simple dictionaries for finding words, highlighter pens for editing, and computers for word processing were provided to encourage children's independence. Children

enjoyed reading together from displayed books featuring collections of their writing or that of their peers. Writing corners provided a place for children to write in their spare time and displayed successful work completed by 'writers of the day'. Teachers created lots of opportunities for children to celebrate and affirm their writing achievements. Children were encouraged to aspire to be writers.

Examples of effective strategies for teaching writing

Full primary, urban, medium size, medium decile
Teachers use a wide range of effective instructional strategies. These include modelling and explaining new skills, and carefully sequencing learning so children can build on their previous learning. They prompt and encourage children to extend their ideas and they ask questions that encourage them to think more deeply. Children are provided with specific feedback that explains to them how well they have achieved the aspects taught in that particular lesson. The purpose of lessons is shared orally and often recorded in class learning journals. Children spoken to were able to share their learning goals.

Full primary, urban, small, medium decile
Children work in groups or with buddies to talk about and practise new writing skills. They capably help each other by reminding their friends of the ideas they shared and suggesting ways to attempt to write new words. Their previous learning is reinforced. Pictures are used for building images in their minds that they can then write about. They regularly brainstorm words and ideas together, and the teacher reinforces their use of new words. They have opportunities to read their stories to each other, and to other classes, and they have them displayed in the classroom. Interactive boards are used in highly motivational ways by children, as well as the teacher, to develop writing skills.

What was not working well

Writing programmes were spasmodic or not purposefully structured in some classes. There were few or no documented school guidelines outlining how teachers should approach writing teaching. Children wrote about topics decided school-wide. The type of writing or genre was matched to a school-wide focus rather than to the genre that would interest and motivate young writers. Teachers over-emphasised daily-diary writing, leaving children without exciting or new experiences to write about. Children were not well motivated and took a long time to begin or complete their writing.

Some lessons were not managed in a way that helped children focus on their goals, compose, edit and publish their work when appropriate. Writing sessions began and ended abruptly, with little time for motivation, instruction or reflection. Children were expected to rewrite and publish their work without a sense of purpose. Children had no opportunities to share their writing or discuss the features of good writing. In some instances, independent writing occurred only one day a week with such things as handwriting, spelling, copying poems and topic writing timetabled for other days. There was little sense of the reciprocal nature of writing with other aspects of literacy.

Ineffective teaching limited children's ability to develop as independent writers. Instruction and feedback focused almost entirely on spelling, punctuation and presentation with little regard to how children formed and expressed their ideas. Offering children the same sentence starters each day made writing repetitive and provided no challenge. Having children tell their teacher a sentence that the adult wrote down, and the children copied, showed a poor understanding of children's writing development and little regard for their attempts.

Limited resources were available in some classrooms to help children spell commonly used words. High frequency words were not displayed, or made known to children before they began writing. As a result their ideas and motivation for writing were interrupted as they waited for the teacher to spell words for them. Teachers did not encourage children's attempts to form letters to represent a word. Very young children were not supported in developing their independence as writers or encouraged to take ownership of their writing.

Ineffective teachers did not base their programmes on children's identified needs. Instruction focused entirely on exploring a topic with the whole class. Children had few opportunities for extra instruction because the small group focus was often the same as for the whole class. Teachers generally gave no time for an instructional teaching session and instead supported children by responding to any learning or behaviour needs they recognised as they moved around the class. Although children were aware of what they were to write about, they had little or no feedback to reinforce what they had learnt, or indicate what to focus on next. Children were not clear about how to improve their writing.

Examples of ineffective teaching of writing practices

Full primary, rural, small, high decile
Although the teacher responds to children's writing with comments, there is little evidence of working with children to extend their understanding of either deeper or surface writing features. The context for writing is based on recounts of events or activities that children were involved in at home, for example, 'at the weekend I…'. Children's writing books do not have any feedback or goals for improvement. The classroom has no examples of children's writing on display.

Contributing primary, urban, medium size, low decile
Writing is planned to focus on a school-wide genre and the teacher's idea of what might be interesting. There is little input or feedback sought from the children about their interests or the meaning of what is written. As activities are broadly 'one-size-fits-all', some children are not challenged and others are not able to work independently on the tasks provided. Instructions and conversations are fleeting, with a focus on fitting writing into the time slot, rather than exploring quality and engaging children. There are almost no children's writing samples displayed in any of the three classrooms. A lack of motivational strategies results in off-task behaviour.

Writing professional learning and development

Fifty-seven percent of schools that completed the questionnaire reported that teachers had participated in some type of PLD on writing during 2007 and 2008. The period of time for professional development initiatives varied. In some schools writing PLD was undertaken for up to three years. In others teachers may have attended one-day courses or worked with a lead teacher or literacy development facilitator for periods of two years, a year, or a school term. Table 2 shows the types of PLD undertaken by teachers in these schools.

Table 2: Professional learning and development in writing

Professional learning and development	2008	2007
General literacy	32%	29%
General writing	31%	19%
Literacy Progressions	11%	1%
Spelling	8%	8%
Oral language	6%	2%
Exemplars	6%	5%
Literacy Lead Teacher	5%	2%
Early literacy	1%	2%
Handwriting	-	1%
Assessment for learning	-	4%

General literacy included Ministry of Education PLD contracts that focused on both reading and writing. Resource Teachers of Literacy, RTLB, Literacy Development Officers and literacy advisors were also used to lead PLD in this and the general writing developments.

Promoting and monitoring high expectations for achievement

For teachers, school leaders and boards of trustees, improving student achievement through good teaching is of prime importance. National Administration Guideline 1 requires each board of trustees, through its principal and staff to develop and implement teaching and learning programmes that focus on student achievement in literacy. This is a key area of accountability in teaching and learning.

When school-wide assessment processes are carried out effectively, school leaders carefully decide the data they will collect, the assessment tools they will use, and how and when they will collate and report the data. They also agree on performance expectations for their children. Using reference points at different stages or year levels allows them to see whether individuals and groups of children are on track to meet these expectations. Careful scrutiny of collated information also allows teachers, school leaders and boards to decide where to put their resources to ensure that children at risk of not achieving have the support to succeed.

ERO considered these questions in investigating schools' expectations for achievement:

- How well does the school promote high levels of children's achievement in reading and writing?
- How well do school leaders monitor achievement and progress in reading and writing?

Promoting high expectations for achievement in reading and writing

Effective schools set clear well-founded expectations for achievement in reading and writing. These expectations sufficiently challenge their children. They have processes that help them use their student achievement information to review and improve their teaching and learning programmes. Effective schools share their expectations with parents and families, and use evidence of children's achievement and progress to help their parents support learning.

In making a judgement on how schools promoted high levels of achievement in reading and writing, ERO investigated how well the school's expectations for learning and achievement were understood.

Reading and writing achievement expectations were not always clearly stated or well understood by teachers, school leaders and parents. In some schools expectations were clear in reading or writing, but not in both. Some schools had informal expectations, known by many teachers, but not formalised or shared with the board or parents. In some schools expectations were clear, but provided considerable challenge for children. However, other expectations were more readily attainable and not likely to encourage teachers to improve their practices and programmes or heighten what they expected of children.

Figure 7: Schools' promotion of high achievement in reading and writing

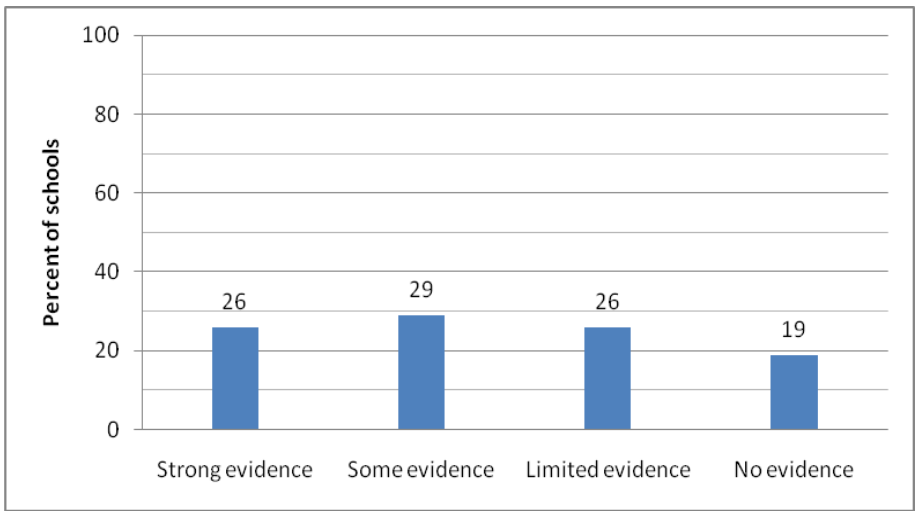


Figure 7 shows that there was either some evidence or strong evidence of the promotion of high levels of achievement in reading and writing in just over half the schools. In just over a quarter of schools there was limited evidence while in 19 percent there was no evidence of clearly understood or pursued expectations.

What was working well in schools

Effective schools had clearly expressed, well-known and well-documented literacy expectations. These were stated as expected reading book levels, six-year net results and writing stages. They were agreed, written and shared with the school community, and used as part of class and school-wide monitoring and review.

Expectations outlined achievement levels children were expected to reach after six months, a year and two years at school. Teachers and school leaders used resources such as the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions,* standardised six-year net scores and the Progress Indicators (English Matrix) from *The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* as reference points to set or modify their expectations. Schools' expectations were developed after reviewing assessment information already collected and were amended to reflect changes in student performance.

Expectations were challenging and focused on improvement. Some teachers understood they were expected to match or exceed national achievement levels. School decile ranking appeared not to be a significant determinant of expectation: some low decile schools aimed to have children achieving at nationally-referenced expectations and constantly reviewed progress towards meeting their goals. Some teams or syndicates set their own annual targets and included these as part of teachers' appraisal goals and for deciding on professional learning and development needs. These targets often promoted improved achievement for groups of children at different year levels and from different ethnic groups or gender. Students' progress rates were monitored regularly and used to identify the need for support or enrichment programmes.

High, but realistic, reading and writing achievement expectations were shared with parents and families. They received reliable and accurate information about how their child was achieving and progressing compared to school and/or nationally referenced expectations. Parents were invited to information evenings to learn more about expected achievement levels and how they could help their child at home. Children were expected to make meaningful progress right from when they began school.

Examples of promoting high achievement expectations

Contributing primary, urban, small, low decile
Teachers know that the school expects children to read at, or very near to, national expectations and be writing at levels commensurate with year and age level. Many of the children began with limited reading and writing skills when they started school. Teachers understood that although children's progress in reading and writing may have been delayed, it was their job to provide the sound foundation for their ongoing learning to help them meet national expectations.

Full primary, rural, small, high decile
The school has very clear expectations as to how children should be achieving in reading. A graph is used to monitor each child's progress in reading over the first three years at school. This clearly shows what the school's expectations are and allows the teacher to quickly see where the child is compared with where they should be. There is also very specific detail about teaching and learning expectations. For each colour on the Ready to Read colour wheel, there is a list of learning objectives to cover. The classroom teacher in the junior room has also written a detailed description of her reading programme. This means that if she was sick or to leave, the new teacher would have clear steps to follow. This description includes notes on assessment practices and tools.

What was not working well

Some schools had no reading and writing achievement expectations in place for Years 1 and 2. Other schools' expectations were not improvement focused or based on student achievement data collected in the school. Although there was often a stated expectation for reading levels a year after the child started school it was not clear what could be expected at other points in the first two years of school.

Some teachers could describe informal expectations that were not explicitly stated or shared with all teachers, trustees and children's families. Teachers in syndicates did not have a consistent understanding of what reading level children were expected to achieve at the various stages during Years 1 and 2. Families were not well informed about how well their children should be achieving in the reading and writing.

In some high decile schools, teachers described how they preferred to give children time to consolidate new learning and, accordingly, set expectations lower or just approaching nationally referenced expectations. Teachers stated that if expectations were raised, too many children would be seen to be failing. Consequently, they set lower goals which they thought were more attainable. Some teachers highlighted what they described as children's inadequate preparation for school, without focusing and building on the skills and knowledge they brought with them. Expectations were too low to challenge the children coming from the school's community.

Expectations were broad and provided limited information to contribute to school self review and improvement. Goals, such as children writing three sentences by the time they turn six, provided little opportunity for discussions about good quality writing. Informal expectations that children would read or write at their chronological age were not well understood when teachers, trustees and parents were not certain what reading or writing behaviours a child needed to achieve at their chronological age.

Examples of little promotion of high achievement expectations

Full primary, urban, large, low decile
School expectations for achievement in reading were clearly stated in school documentation, but were well below nationally referenced expectations. School-wide achievement records did not clearly outline what the national expectation was, so it was not obvious to teachers, parents and trustees if children were achieving below this when they reported children as achieving at the school expectation.

Contributing primary, urban, small, medium decile
The school's expectations were not documented, and were informally kept in teachers' heads rather than explicitly stated.

The goals and targets schools are setting for Years 1 and 2 children

School leaders were asked to describe reading or writing goals, targets or expectations they had set for their Years 1 and 2 children in 2009. Although many schools had expectations in place, the clarity of these or likelihood that they would promote improvements varied considerably.

Reading goals and expectations

Eighty-four percent of schools who completed the school questionnaire reported they had a reading goal or target for children at the end of Year 1, while only 72 percent of these schools had goals or targets for children's reading achievement after their second year at school. This reflected the number of schools that set expectations linked to six-year net testing, but then had no explicit goals for Year 2 children. When children start school they progress through books levelled in different colour groups from the Ready to Read series.[19] The draft *Literacy Learning Progressions*

[19] See the glossary to see how Reading Recovery (RR) levels compare to the colours on the Ready to Read series.

suggest that children should be reading at Green in the Ready to Read series after one year of instruction and at Purple after two years.

Table 3: Year 1 reading goals or targets for after one year at school or end of Y1

Target	Percent of schools
Children will be reading at Orange or RR Levels 15/16	1%
Children will be reading at Green or RR Levels 12/13/14	25%
Children will be reading at Dark Blue or RR levels 9/10/11	12%
Children will read at Yellow or RR levels 6/7/8	4%
Children will achieve to national levels	2%
Children will achieve within a defined wedge graph	3%
Children will read within a year of, at or above their chronological age	12%
Specific skills listed such as reading on and knowing basic word lists	8%
Children will show a love for or interest in reading	5%
Goals were non-specific and did not outline the actual expectation	8%
Goal described expected progress i.e. increase reading level by 10 months	2%
Children will read with understanding	2%
No goals or targets are set for reading at end of Year 1	16%

About a quarter of schools that completed the questionnaire had goals set for Year 1 children's reading that match the reference points in the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions.* No achievement goals or targets were set for Year 1 children in 16 percent of the schools.

Table 4: Year 2 reading goals or targets for, after two years at school or end of Y2

Target	Percent of schools
Children will be reading at or above Gold or Level 21	1%
Children will be reading at Purple or RR Levels 19/20	14%
Children will achieve within a defined wedge graph or at national levels	2%
Children will be reading at Turquoise (or Light Blue) RR level 17/18	14%
Children will be reading at Orange or RR level 15/16	5%
Children will be reading at Blue or Green or RR levels 11/13/14	1%
Children will correctly read a given number of words from word lists	2%
Children will be reading at their chronological age	16%
Targets were non-specific such as reach their age appropriate level	10%
Children will achieve the small range of skills listed by individual schools	7%
No target or goals set for end of Year 2 in reading	28%

At least 17 percent of schools that completed the questionnaire had expectations set for the end of Year 2 that matched or exceeded the expectations in the draft *Literacy Learning Progressions.* Twenty-eight percent of schools had not set reading goals for their Year 2 children.

Goals suggesting an emphasis on chronological reading age were often linked to a school-wide focus on measuring achievement by comparing a child's actual age to their reading age. The practice of reporting chronological reading age is not useful for Years 1 and 2 children as all five-year-olds are identified as reading at a five-year-old level and above. Those who are not making expected progress are therefore not identified until they are six or seven-years-old, when the process can finally demonstrate that they are falling behind.

Some goals were not easy for trustees or parents to understand. They lacked specificity and outlined the percentage of children they aimed to have read above expectation, without stating the actual expectation. Some schools set the goal of having children love reading. While this is a highly desirable outcome, it lacks a focus on improving achievement, and is difficult to measure. In other schools, leaders listed sets of skills children were to achieve. Some expectations, that children would learn to integrate different sources of information or would think more critically about text, had little emphasis on the range of reading skills Years 1 and 2 children need to learn and build on.

Writing goals and expectations

Seventy-one percent of schools that completed the questionnaire reported having a writing goal or target for Year 1 children, and 70 percent had goals or targets for Year 2 children's writing achievement.

Schools were using various tools to explain writing achievement expectation. Some used the levels from the *New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* English matrix or a modified matrix linked to asTTle assessments. Some schools used the term Level 1 basic (1b) to describe the writing behaviours of beginning writers. Children then moved through to level 1(ii) or level 1 proficient (1p), level 1(iii) or level 1 advanced (1a) before starting the first stage of level 2.

Table 5: Year 1 writing goals or targets for after one year at school or end of Year 1

Target	Percent of schools
Writing matrix level 1(iii) or level 1a	2%
Writing matrix level 1(ii) or level 1p	18%
Writing matrix level 1(i) or level 1b	11%
Criteria lists focused on letter formation, letter-sound relationships and encoding words	10%
Criteria focused on how many sentences or words the child can write	10%
At or above an unexplained expectation	6%
Chronological writing age	3%
First Steps – experimental writer level	2%
Move 1 or 2 stages or sub levels in a year	2%
Stages or mastery of phonics programmes	1%
Plan and share their own ideas	1%
Could write a given number of words in 10 minutes	1%
Other categories	4%
No writing goals or targets set	29%

Many schools were not confident about setting achievement goals or targets for beginning writers. Twenty-nine percent reported no writing goals for young children. Thirty-seven percent set a quantitative achievement goal or target to show how well their children should achieve by the end of Year 1. Most of these used the English matrix from *The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars* or a modified matrix that used asTTle terms.

Twenty percent of schools defined specific sets of skills that children should be able to demonstrate. These generally focused on the formation of letters, words and sentences. Some goals included in the 'other categories' section had expectations such as enjoyment of writing, use of finger spaces between words or ability to copy and read back their own sentences. Goals that suggested children would achieve a chronological writing age, or that a given percentage would reach an unstated expectation, indicated a lack of confidence in setting measurable writing targets.

Table 6: Year 2 writing goals or targets for after two years at school or end of Year 2

Target	Percent of schools
Writing matrix level 2 or level 2b	1%
Writing matrix level 1(iii) or level 1a	22%
Writing matrix level 1(ii) or level 1p	5%
Criteria lists focused on spelling, punctuation and a set number of sentences	16%
Criteria focused developing and extending ideas	6%
At or above an unexplained expectation	6%
Chronological writing age	4%
First Steps – early writer	2%
Move 1 or 2 stages or sub levels in a year	2%
Completed various spelling lists	2%
Other categories	4%
No writing goals or targets set	30%

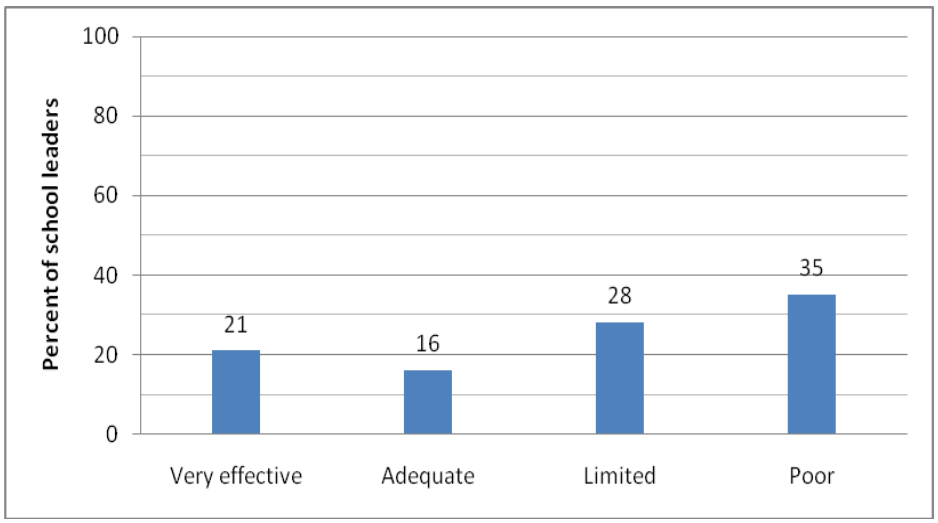
Thirty percent of schools that completed the questionnaire reported having no goals or targets for improving the achievement of Year 2 children in writing.

School leaders monitoring achievement and progress in reading and writing

Effective schools use achievement information to set annual goals and targets, and monitor children's progress against these targets. They also use their data to decide which interventions are necessary and where to allocate learning resources. They further use achievement information to decide what PLD is needed to support teaching and learning.

Planning for improvement is likely to be enhanced when school leaders and trustees know which aspects of teaching support children to achieve. The quality of monitoring and review is a critical aspect of effective school practice.

Figure 8: Monitoring of achievement and progress by school leaders



Sixty-three percent of schools did not monitor reading and writing achievement well. Figure 8 shows that only 21 percent of schools had very effective and a further 16 percent had adequate processes for monitoring reading and writing achievement in Years 1 and 2.

What was working well in schools

School leaders understood the importance of using achievement data for self review. They could visualise monitoring and review as a cyclical endeavour or inquiry process, where the data gathered from assessments provided the basis on which school decisions were made to improve learning.

Effective school leaders asked three important questions about their data:

1. How are our Years 1 and 2 children achieving in reading and writing; are they where they need to be to succeed and where do we now need to focus?
2. What do we need to do to support teachers to ensure that all groups of children in Years 1 and 2 progress and achieve appropriately?
3. How successful have we been – how do we know that what we put in place worked?

These questions leaders asked successfully exemplify the 'Teaching as Inquiry' process.

Often a leader, such as the deputy principal or the literacy leader was responsible for monitoring achievement and progress information for Years 1 and 2 children. They shared and discussed their findings with the principal and school board. In other cases the principal collated, analysed and shared the data. Syndicates and teams also discussed and used data to evaluate their own practices and decide on PLD priorities.

Achievement information was used to decide about interventions for children requiring learning support. School charter targets focused on specific groups of children identified as needing to improve the most. Information about the selection of students and allocation of resources for interventions were shared with the board, and later the programme outcomes were reported. This was seen as highly important because of the considerable investment boards make in resourcing learning for these young students.

Examples of effective monitoring of achievement and progress

Contributing primary, urban, large, low decile
The assistant principal tracks student achievement in the junior syndicate and reviews this to check that all children are progressing at suitable rates. Data is shared with the school trustees, and on the basis of this information, the board supported the buddy reading programme and invested extra resources in the reception class. Children's learning needs are identified soon after they started school and there is close monitoring of progress made by children needing extra support.

Contributing primary, urban, medium size, medium decile
Good processes are in place for the early identification of those children needing additional support. As well as children at risk of not achieving, children with gifts and talents are included. Processes are in place for teachers to collaboratively discuss children's achievement, rates of progress, effective teaching practices and to share possible solutions for those not making the desired progress. Discussions about target groups of children were comprehensive.

What was not working well

Sixty-three percent of schools had little evidence of systematic monitoring in Years 1 and 2. School leaders were generally more confident discussing and sharing assessment results for the middle or upper primary school, than for Years 1 and 2. Some useful assessments such as the six-year net were collated, but only used to decide which children needed to take part in Reading Recovery programmes. This valuable data was not used to reflect on, or adjust, teaching practices, or to review the quality of programmes or interventions.

The lack of agreed or clear achievement expectations made it difficult for some leaders to identify and monitor how Years 1 and 2 children were achieving overall. Reporting how many children school-wide were achieving a year behind their chronological age, also meant emerging issues in the junior school were not identified. The practice of reporting the average reading level for each age group masked information about how many children were falling behind an acceptable level.

Although some school guidelines specified the need to monitor individual children's reading and writing achievement and progress, there were no expectations to guide who should do this. Some principals felt they didn't need to look at data for children in Years 1 and 2 as they trusted their junior school teachers or leaders who were experienced and knew their children well. In some cases achievement and progress was monitored for either reading or writing, but not for both.

Some teachers and school leaders did not want to examine their data, or chose to ignore achievement information that did not show positive results. In some schools that were working with a cluster of other schools, a professional development facilitator had collected, or assisted with, data analysis of. However, some teachers and leaders ignored this information and did not share it with the board or their school community. Teachers spent time justifying why the particular assessment tool that was used did not suit their children, or tried to explain what had invalidated the results. Schools did not use data indicating poor achievement to reflect on what they were doing. Instead they used it to request additional funding for adult helpers to support their teaching.

Boards of trustees make many important investment decisions about reading interventions for Years 1 and 2 children. Many school had few processes to monitor the effect of these programmes on children's achievement. Teachers often shared information with trustees about the programme content without using assessments to demonstrate whether these interventions were improving children's achievement from when they started, to when they were discontinued from the programme.

Examples of ineffective monitoring of or response to achievement expectations

Contributing primary, urban, small, high decile
Although information is reported to the board about reading results from STAR (Years 3 to 6), no information is shared about Years 1 and 2 reading. School entry and six-year net information was collected but not collated, analysed or reported. While writing data was collated and analysed for all year groups, including for Years 1 and 2, this information was not analysed to provide any indication of how children were actually achieving in relation to expectation for their age. In each case, the principal analysed the data and commented that the data for younger children was difficult to interpret, as they were all still learning to write and thus, may all be viewed as average until they were older.

Contributing primary, urban, small, medium decile
Reading and writing assessments are collected for individual classes and sent to the principal at the end of every year. These data are not collated or analysed to show progress or reported to the board to show how well children are achieving. The November 2008 data shows that all children in Years1 and 2 are reading below nationally referenced expectations. The school leaders stated 'that's just how it is; children arrive at their school with very few reading and writing skills'. They also believe their children don't learn any reading and writing skills until they start school.

Interventions provided by schools

Many schools provided intervention programmes or resourced extra teachers or teacher aides to support children who needed additional assistance with reading and writing. In the questionnaire, schools were asked to detail the types of interventions they provided. Sixty-eight percent of schools who completed the questionnaire used Reading Recovery as an intervention. Most of the children participating in Reading Recovery were in Year 2.

A wide variety of specific reading or oral language programmes were used in many schools' questionnaire responses. Some were school developed interventions where students worked in small target groups. Other specific programmes named included:

- Hei Āwhiawhi Tamariki ki te Pānui Pukapuka (HPP);
- Bannatyne Programme;
- Toe by Toe;
- Davis Learning Strategies;
- Talk to Learn;
- Talk First;
- Hauraki Early Language Programme; and
- Success Maker.

Table 7 shows the main types of interventions schools reported they were providing to support Years 1 and 2 children.

Table 7: School interventions for Years 1 and 2

Intervention	Percent of schools
Reading Recovery	68%
Specific Reading Programmes	43%
Oral Language programmes	36%
Teacher Aide[20]	35%
Phonics or letter-sound	19%
Parents and Grandparents	18%
RTLB	14%
RTLit	14%
ESOL	8%
Peer/Buddy Reading	8%
Paired or small group writing	7%
One-to-one instruction	6%
Rainbow Reading	6%
Early Intervention	5%
SENCO	5%
Handwriting	5%
Cross grouping	4%
Motor or movement programmes	3%
SPELD	2%
Resource teacher of Māori (RTM)	1%

The July 2008 ERO report *Schools' Provision for Students at Risk of not Achieving*[21] found that although most schools could adequately identify children at risk of not achieving in literacy, there was much wider variation in the quality and effectiveness of how schools monitored, reviewed and reported on the interventions provided. The schools' questionnaire about the teaching of reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 highlighted the significant investment many boards of trustees made on interventions for Years 1 and 2 children.

Schools need to be clear about why they choose particular resources and programmes, and the impact these have on children at risk of not achieving. Principals and senior school leaders have a central role in monitoring these young children's progress and asking about how best to meet this group's needs.

[20] It was unclear what intervention the teacher aide was providing.
[21] To access this report please visit http://www.ero.govt.nz/ero/publishing.nsf/Content/Reports+-+National+Reports

Discussion

Learning to read and write

Teachers have an important role helping children acquire the knowledge, strategies and awareness necessary to become effective readers and writers. An emphasis on planned, deliberate teaching along with providing opportunities for other incidental literacy learning is critical. As children begin formal instruction at school they have to know how texts work and in particular that there is a relationship between what they hear and the written text they read or create through writing. Teachers cannot assume that children will learn to read and write by being in a literacy programme. They need explicit and direct instruction, focused on specific outcomes.

Learning to read and write is like being a 'code cracker'. Writing has conventions that require the decoding and encoding skills of reading and writing letters, words and text. Learners have to master not only the code, but also use their knowledge and strategies to get meaning from what they read, and to convey meaning through what they write.

Many teachers regularly provided highly motivating opportunities for children to develop and enjoy their writing. They gave children a purpose to their writing and encouraged them to write about things meaningful to them. Teaching was focused and well paced, helping children to maintain enthusiasm and participate at a challenging and achievable level.

As children master the skills involved in decoding, their reading becomes more fluent, freeing them to use more of their cognitive abilities to work out the meaning of different sorts of texts. Similarly, as they master the expertise needed to record sounds, spell words, and form sentences, they become more fluent writers and can then apply more of their thinking to convey meaning in increasingly sophisticated ways for different audiences.

Schools brought about positive changes in teaching practice through managing their own PLD. School leaders or lead teachers in schools, shared literature about best teaching practice. Teachers observed and shared recognised good practice that they could then introduce into their own classes. Lead teachers mentored colleagues to use an increasing set of teaching approaches, and school leaders and trustees identified ways for supporting teachers to enhance their content knowledge and skills.

Creating an environment to learn

Effective teachers create an environment in which children's learning flourishes. They understand that children learn best when they are accepted, acknowledged for who they are and are able to actively contribute to their own and others' learning. However, a positive and supportive environment alone is not sufficient to promote children's literacy progress and achievement.

When children come to school they bring existing knowledge and experiences gained from social, cultural and language settings outside the school. This knowledge is used

to construct meaning and develop new understandings. The diversity among learners can present a challenge for teachers. They need in-depth content knowledge of reading and writing teaching to recognise and build on what the child knows.

Successful teachers used a range of reading teaching practices and combined these to cater for the needs of students from different cultures and with differing abilities. Teachers captured children's interest, helped them to identify word patterns, encouraged them to share ideas, explored the meaning of new words and helped them to progress and achieve.

Effective teachers made expectations clear to children by talking about their reading and writing goals. They explained to children why they were working towards these and why they were important. They also discussed progress towards these goals with parents and, together, decided on how parents and families could work with their child to support ongoing learning.

Assessing to learn

Effective assessment is focused on improving teaching and learning, and on raising achievement. It involves the process of collecting, analysing and using information about what children know and can do. Teachers with rich information about children's reading and writing skills can actively involve them in their learning, by helping them understand what they need to do next to progress. They can also collect and share assessment information with parents and whānau to support children's reading at home.

Teachers collect assessment information in different ways. Sometimes this is informal and constructive in supporting immediate learning needs. Most often it is planned and systematic. To be effective, teachers need to be clear about which assessment tools and reference points to use, and how best to apply these to help them plan for, and monitor, their children's achievement and progress.

Teachers are also involved in making judgements about how well children are achieving. This involves drawing on and analysing evidence gathered up to a particular point in time. Effective teachers were skilled at using the range of formal and less formal sources of information to make these judgements. They could match these with the targets and expectations set, and had ways of ensuring that their judgements were consistent with those of their colleagues.

Setting and monitoring expectations

The expectations of both school leaders and teachers can influence the rates of children's progress or actual success. Even when teachers are focused on children's learning, inappropriate teacher expectations can undermine them, or impede practice. Teacher expectations have been found to vary according to student ethnicity, ability, gender and other characteristics unrelated to a student's actual capability.[22] In his

[22] Ministry of Education (2003). *Quality teaching for diverse children in schooling: best evidence synthesis.* Wellington: Ministry of Education (p.16).

early review of two decades of research on teacher expectations, Good[23] concluded that the critical element in teacher expectations was training teachers to expect to teach students effectively regardless of the child's current performance.

Effective leaders work collaboratively with teachers to analyse their Years 1 and 2 assessment data before setting goals or targets designed to improve achievement. They make important expectations, targets or milestones known to school trustees, teachers, students and parents. Leaders assist each of these groups to understand how they can help children achieve the agreed expectations.

Monitoring student achievement and progress is a key area of accountability for school leaders and boards. Inquiry-focused leaders develop a professional and reflective school climate where teachers and trustees are encouraged to examine achievement data to decide where learning and teaching improvements are needed. They are highly interested in how well students are developing and progressing as readers and writers from when they start school.

Intervening for success

Good classroom teaching, along with specific identification of children's reading and writing needs, is the first point of intervention for most students at risk of not achieving. An astute and timely response on the part of the classroom teacher can counteract the need for more significant interventions later in a child's school life. The first two years at school demand knowledgeable and skilful practitioners.

Many schools in this study provided different sorts of interventions for children identified as being at risk. Some were formal programmes such as Reading Recovery, or were provided through the auspices of skilled personnel such as specialist resource teachers. Other programmes were school-based individual or group interventions using part-time staff, teacher aides, adult helpers or paired approaches. Some were commercially-produced packages supervised by various school staff.

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[23] Good, T.L. (1987). Two decades of research on teacher expectations: findings and future directions. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(4) 32-47.

Conclusion

Teachers, school leaders and school trustees all have a vital role in how well children learn to read and write in their first years at school.

Teachers

The teacher's knowledge and understanding of literacy learning, and the degree to which he or she masters the teaching and learning process, will greatly affect a child's success. This is a considerable responsibility, but one that teachers throughout New Zealand take on each day, most with a passion and commitment for their role, and many with a high degree of skill.

In this evaluation ERO found that effective teachers of Years 1 and 2 students:

- had an in-depth understanding of the theories and content knowledge they could use to teach all children to read and write successfully;
- were confident in using assessment tools and, together with other information, made overall judgements about how well and how appropriately children were achieving and what was needed for them to progress;
- were clear about what they expected children to achieve in reading and writing, and recognised and responded to the progress made in the critical first years at school;
- had an extensive repertoire of instructional teaching strategies to tailor their teaching and learning programmes so children had the best opportunities to learn in ways that were engaging and motivating;
- based structured, deliberate and incidental teaching on the assessed and diagnosed needs of individuals and groups of children;
- were aware of and confident user of a range of teaching practices to support students who were not meeting reading and writing achievement expectations;
- shared information with children to help them set and understand learning goals, and planned ways to help them achieve these;
- worked with parents to discuss the child's achievement, progress and next learning so parents were involved and encouraged to work with their child to increase success with reading and writing;
- understood that the quality of their teaching and the inclusiveness of the learning environment made a difference to children's success with reading and writing;
- monitored the impact of their teaching and made necessary improvements;
- talked frequently with their colleagues about what was working and what they needed to change or improve; and
- worked with others to suggest the best possible solutions to help students who needed to make additional progress to reach the desired expectation.

School leaders

School leaders facilitate improved achievement through effective monitoring and review. However in some schools, this crucially important role of monitoring children's progress in Years 1 and 2 was left the entirely to the classroom teacher/s.

Effective leaders were highly interested in the teaching and learning in Years 1 and 2 classes. Successful leaders:

- understood that it was their responsibility to inquire into achievement and progress at each level of the school. They used assessment information to lead changes in teaching for all children, including those in Years 1 and 2;
- developed a culture of school-wide inquiry, giving time for collegial discussion to critique whether intended improvements were brought about and assist teachers to build their professional understanding of progressions children need to succeed with reading and writing;
- were involved in establishing, communicating and monitoring clear reading and writing expectations of achievement and progress for Years 1 and 2 children;
- knew where these early expectations fitted with those set for succeeding years; and
- established their own data monitoring, analysis and reflection cycles and used these to decide on, or recommend, necessary changes to professional learning and development, learning resources and teaching programmes to improve achievement for Years 1 and 2 children.

Trustees

Trustees have an important role in promoting the success of their Years 1 and 2 students in reading and writing. National Administration Guideline 1 outlines boards' responsibilities and signals the priorities accorded to the teaching and assessment of literacy. Trustees' prime role, through their school leaders and teachers, is to make decisions about how their school resources (people and money) can be best used to promote teaching, learning and ultimately children's success. They need timely and accurate information to do this effectively.

In this evaluation ERO found that effective boards of trustees were highly interested in literacy teaching programmes, and how well children were progressing and achieving. Successful trustees:

- were well informed by school leaders about teaching programmes and children's progress and achievement in reading and writing;
- discussed this information with school leaders so they could make informed decisions about how best to budget for and use the school's resources to support and improve children's learning and achievement;
- expected to receive ongoing monitoring and review information from school leaders about the effectiveness of teaching programmes and interventions; and

- supported teachers through approving time and expenses for professional learning and development programmes to enhance teaching.

Next steps

ERO recommends that school leaders, teachers and trustees use the findings in this report to reflect on the quality of teaching, assessment and monitoring of reading and writing for children in their first two years at school.

In particular, ERO recommends that:

School leaders

- develop their capability to use achievement data from Years 1 and 2 for monitoring and self review;
- give trustees regular information that clearly identifies the extent of underachievement in Years 1 and 2 and outlines strategies to increase children's progress; and
- actively promote and/or lead opportunities for teachers to discuss achievement data and develop their theory and content knowledge to improve teaching for children in Years 1 and 2.

Boards of Trustees

- ensure, where possible, that children in Years 1 and 2 classes are taught by teachers who are knowledgeable and confident in teaching early reading and writing; and
- monitor the impact of interventions on raising student achievement, giving particular regard to the board's significant investment in staffing and resources for Years 1 and 2 children.

Teachers

- participate in ongoing opportunities to extend their understanding of the theory and content knowledge so they are confident in using effective teaching or reading and writing for Years 1 and 2 students; and
- develop their capability in using reference points to monitor children's progress towards expected achievement levels.

The Ministry of Education

- develop writing assessment tools for Years 1 and 2; and
- support beginning teachers so they can confidently use and analyse data from a range of reading and writing assessment tools, and are introduced to a repertoire of teaching approaches that cater for all Years 1 and 2 students' literacy needs.

Appendix 1: Methodology

Evaluation framework and approach

Two overarching evaluative questions guided this evaluation:

- *How well do teachers assess, plan and teach reading and writing to children in Years 1 and 2?*
- *How well does the school promote and monitor high achievement expectations in reading and writing in Years 1 and 2?*

ERO collected evidence for the two overarching evaluative questions and a set of investigative questions by observing teacher practice, talking with key groups of teachers and senior staff members and looking at school documents relevant to their inquiry.

Reviewers recorded their judgements on a separate synthesis sheet and reported information material to each school in the individual school report. The complete evaluation framework including the investigative questions is detailed in Appendix 2.

As well as the synthesis sheet, there was a school questionnaire. Reviewers used the information from this questionnaire to scope their evaluation, and responses were aggregated to inform this report. Responses were received from 70 percent of the schools in this evaluation and information from these questionnaires supports the school findings.

The findings also include extracts from review officer comments about unidentified school practice. These comments provide examples of effective or ineffective practice in the teaching of reading and writing.

Sample of schools

ERO evaluated literacy in Years 1 and 2 in all schools where ERO carried out an education review in Term 1 and Term 2, 2009. The types of schools, roll size, school locality (urban or rural) and decile ranges of the schools are shown in Tables 1 to 3 below.

Table 1: School types

School type	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage[24]
Full Primary (Y1-8)	110	52	54
Contributing (Y1-6)	96	45	39
Composite (Y1-15)	6	3	7
Total	212	100	100

Table 1 shows that composite schools in the sample were under-represented and contributing primary schools were over-represented in comparison to national figures, but this difference was not statistically significant.[25]

Table 2: Roll size

Roll size[26]	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Small	108	51	51
Medium	40	19	25
Large	64	30	24
Total	212	100	100

Table 2 shows that medium sized schools in the sample were under-represented, and large schools were over-represented in comparison to national figures, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 3: School locality

Locality	Number	Percentage of sample	National percentage
Urban	133	63	65
Rural	79	37	35
Total	212	100	100

Table 3 shows that the number of urban and rural schools in the sample is representative of national figures.

[24] The national percentage of each school type is based on the total population of schools as at 1 July 2008. For this study it includes full and contributing primaries and composite schools. This applies to locality and decile in Tables 2 and 3.
[25] The differences between observed and expected values were tested using a Chi square test.
[26] Roll sizes for full and contributing primary schools are: small (under 150), medium (150-300), large (over 300). Roll sizes for composite schools (secondary) are: small (under 300), medium (300-700), large (over 700).

Table 4: School decile ranges

Decile[27]	**Number**	**Percentage of sample**	**National percentage**
Low decile (1-3)	50	23	30
Middle decile (4-7)	78	37	30
High decile (8-10	84	40	40
Total	212	100	100

Table 4 shows that low decile schools in the sample were under-represented and high decile schools were over-represented in comparison to national figures, but this difference was not statistically significant.

[27] A school's decile indicates the extent to which a school draws its children from low socio-economic communities. Decile 1 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the highest proportion of children from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10 percent of schools with the lowest proportion of these children.

Appendix 2: Evaluative questions

Section A Reading

1. How well do teachers in Years 1 and 2 classes use reading assessments to inform their practice?
    1a. How well do teachers understand and undertake reading assessments?
    1b. How well do teachers use reading assessments to decide what to teach individuals and groups of children?
    1c. How well do teachers use reading assessments to know about the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and programme?
    1d. How well do teachers share reading assessment information or seek information from parents and the children?
2. How well do teachers in Years 1 and 2 use instructional teaching strategies in their classrooms?
    2a. How well do teachers decide on and use instructional reading strategies to meet the identified needs and interests of their children?
    2b. How well do teachers engage their children in reading?
3. What is the overall quality of teaching of reading in Years 1 and 2?

Section B Writing

4. How well do teachers in Years 1 and 2 classrooms collect and use writing assessments?
    4a. How well do teachers understand and undertake writing assessments?
    4b. How well do teachers use writing assessments to decide on what they will teach individuals and groups of children in their classrooms?
    4c. How well do teachers use writing assessments to know about the effectiveness of their teaching strategies and programme?
    4d. How well do teachers share writing assessment information or seek information from parents and the children?
5. How well do teachers in Years 1 and 2 use instructional teaching strategies for writing in their classrooms?
    5a. How well do teachers decide on and use the instructional writing strategies to meet the identified needs and interests of their children?
    5b. How well do teachers engage children in writing?
6. What is the overall quality of teaching of writing in Years 1 and 2?

Section C Expectations for achievement

7. How well does the school promote high levels of children's achievement in reading and writing?

7a. How well are the school's expectations for learning and achievement in reading understood?

7b. How well are the school's expectations for learning and achievement in writing understood?

8. How well do school leaders monitor the reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 classes?

Appendix 3: Glossary of terms

asTTle	Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning (asTTle) gives teachers good information about their children's achievement and progress in reading, writing and mathematics. The tool is specially designed for New Zealand children from Year 4 to Year 12, including those learning in Māori medium.
Concepts about print	These are concepts that show how much a child knows about how books, text, and pictures work. For example, reading from left to right and top to bottom, and making connections between the text and illustrations. For more information see *Effective Literacy Practice in Years 1 to 4*, p33.
Decoding and encoding	When decoding children work out what a word is saying by using the sounds the letters in a word make. Encoding is the opposite as children use their knowledge of the relationship between letters and sounds to work out how to write a word.
Five-year net	This is the same as the Six-year net (see below) with the norms set for children that are five years of age.
Guided reading	In guided reading a group of children read a text which has been selected by the teacher, and explore the text together through discussion. The teacher supports children's use of appropriate reading strategies. The teacher selects the text, based on the learning needs of the children.
Junior Oral Screening Test (JOST)	JOST is used to identify children who need further development in speaking. JOST is used to find out the level of children's vocabulary development, use of social language and understanding of simple grammar. The test is most often used during children's first year at school but it is suitable for older children.
Learning intentions	Make learning explicit to children by using language they understand to explain the specific skill, process or action they are learning.
Letter-sound knowledge	When teachers assess a child's letter sound knowledge they find out what the child knows about the names of the alphabet letters and some of the sounds they make.
Literacy advisors	School Support Literacy Advisors provide support and guidance for teachers and principals in primary and secondary schools. Their main focus is on improving classroom practice. They also provide professional development for teachers in the area of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). School Support Literacy Advisors run workshops and provide in-class modelling on aspects of effective literacy practice for children.
Literacy Development Officers	Literacy Development Officers (LDOs) are local Ministry of Education staff who support schools to strengthen literacy teaching in Years 1-8. They can help your school examine the effectiveness of existing literacy programmes to make informed, evidence-based decisions to improve literacy achievement for children. Their key role is to assist schools to analyse literacy data, review literacy goals and plans, and broker the provision of targeted professional support. Funds may be available to enable your school to access appropriate support.

Modelling	Modelling or 'showing how' is a form of instruction that makes the thinking involved in the exercise visible to the children. Modelling can be used by teachers as a deliberate act of teaching.
Modelling books	As they do the 'showing how' teachers often record the ideas and strategies in big books as a class resource of modelling activities, for children and teachers to revisit.
New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars and Matrices (or Matrix)	The New Zealand Curriculum Exemplars are selected examples of children's work that show learning and achievement in relation to national curriculum levels. Teachers use the exemplars to make judgements about their children's work by comparing it with the standards shown in the exemplars. Matrices are lists of steps children need to progress through to cover the key areas required to learn to read and write.
New Zealand Curriculum levels	The New Zealand Curriculum statements include eight levels of achievement. Five-year-olds usually work at level 1 and by the time children are 17 or 18 they will be at level 7 or 8. There is useful information about the New Zealand Curriculum on the Ministry of Education's website, Te Kete Ipurangi http://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/.
Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS)	PIPS is a CD-ROM based programme which assesses reading and mathematics achievement and progress for Year 1 to Year 6 children. There are also science PIPS for children in Year 6. There is more information on the PIPS website – (www.cemcentre.org/renderpage.asp?LinkID=22210000).
Phonics	Phonics is the relationship between spoken sounds and the letters that represent them; and the correspondence between sound and symbol in an alphabetical writing system.
Phonological awareness	Phonological awareness refers to an individual's awareness of the sound structure, or phonological structure, of a spoken word. It includes the ability to aurally distinguish units of speech, such as a word's syllables and a syllable's individual phonemes. The ability to segment and blend phonemes is critical for the development of decoding skills, reading fluency, and spelling.
PROBE	Prose reading observation behaviour and evaluation of comprehension. PROBE is one type of reading running record that includes an oral reading comprehension test.
Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs)	PATs are standardised tests developed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER). There are PATs for Year 4 to Year 10 children in reading comprehension, reading vocabulary and mathematics. There is a listening comprehension PAT for Year 3 to Year 10 students.
Reading Recovery	Reading Recovery is a one-to-one teaching programme for children who have made slow progress learning to read and write in their first year at school. It is a 12 to 20 week programme undertaken for half an hour daily. Many New Zealand schools provide this catch-up opportunity. Each child's reading and writing is assessed close to their sixth birthday and from this data some children are selected to take part in the Reading Recovery programme at school as soon as a space is available.
Reading running records	Reading running records are used to assess the progress of, and strategies used by, children who are developing confidence with reading fluency. This tool is mostly used in junior classes. The child read a passage aloud to the teacher who records how the

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>child reads each word. The record shows details of mistakes, changes made and the way the child goes back to make sense of a phrase.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reading Recovery levels related to Ready to Read colours</td><td>
<table>
<tr><th>Reading Recovery level</th><th>Ready to Read series</th></tr>
<tr><td>21+</td><td>Gold</td></tr>
<tr><td>19 – 20</td><td>Purple</td></tr>
<tr><td>17 – 18</td><td>Light Blue</td></tr>
<tr><td>15 – 16</td><td>Orange</td></tr>
<tr><td>12 – 14</td><td>Green</td></tr>
<tr><td>9 – 11</td><td>Dark Blue</td></tr>
<tr><td>6 – 8</td><td>Yellow</td></tr>
<tr><td>3 – 5</td><td>Red</td></tr>
<tr><td>1 – 2</td><td>Magenta</td></tr>
</table>
</td></tr>
<tr><td>Ready to Read</td><td>Ready to Read is a graded reading series published for the Ministry of Education to support reading programmes in junior classes (children aged 5 to 8 years). Ready to Read texts feature situations, characters, and language that reflect the lives and interests of New Zealand children. The series includes single titles, big books, and poem cards, as well as tapes, CDs, and support material for teachers. The series includes books in a range of text forms including narratives, personal recounts, photo articles, reports, explanations, and instructions.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB)</td><td>The RTLB service provides advice and support to help teacher s in small clusters of schools to meet the needs of students with additional learning and behaviour needs.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Resource Teacher: Literacy (RTLit)</td><td>The RT:Lit service provides advice and support to help teachers in cluster schools to meet the needs of Years 0 to 8 children at risk of low achievement due to learning difficulties in literacy.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Resource Teacher: Māori (RTM)</td><td>The RTM service assists principals and teachers to provide programmes of work for Years 0 to 8 children in Māori immersion settings.</td></tr>
<tr><td>School Entry Assessment (SEA)</td><td>SEA is a standardised assessment procedure that can be used to collect information on the oral language, early mathematics and early reading knowledge and understanding of new entrants. In many schools teachers may use parts of the assessment tool combined with other assessments they have selected. The teacher usually tests children about four to eight weeks after they have started school.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Shared reading</td><td>Shared reading is an instructional approach during which the teacher explicitly teaches the strategies and skills of proficient readers. The teacher and children read the text together. Children have an opportunity to gradually assume more responsibility for the reading as their skill level and confidence increase. Shared reading provides an environment for children to practice the behaviours of proficient readers with the support of teacher and peers. Shared reading may be offered to the whole class or a small group of children and may focus on needs indicated in assessment data.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Shared writing</td><td>Shared writing involves the teacher and a group of children (perhaps the whole class) in planning and writing a text together. The teacher models the writing process, using explicit instruction of writing strategies. Children contribute ideas and their expertise during this process. Children then write their own text.</td></tr>
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Six-year net (Six-year observation survey)	The six-year observation survey is a comprehensive assessment of each six-year-old child's progress in reading and writing. The Six-year net helps teachers to compare how children are progressing with reading levels, alphabet knowledge, word test, writing knowledge. To help teachers compare achievement and progress results are recorded as stanines.
Stanine	A stanine indicates a children's rank in comparison with other children who took the same test. Stanines are expressed as a scale of nine units with a low of one and a high of nine. The scale follows a bell-curve, where 20 percent of the children fit within stanine five, four percent in stanine nine, and four percent in stanine one.
Supplementary Achievement Test in Reading (STAR)	The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) developed STAR. Three tests are designed for different age groups (Year 3, Years 4 to 6 and Years 7 to 9). The achievement of each student can be compared with stanines. Teachers also use the information to group and plan for children's reading instruction.
Teaching as Inquiry process	Teachers inquire into the impact of their teaching on children. The process is cyclic where they use assessments and research to decide on which teaching strategies are most likely to achieve success for their children. The teacher establishes a baseline from what has already been learned and what children need to learn next. Outcomes are assessed and analysed to identify implications for future teaching.
Three-way conferencing	During the interview process, children, teachers and parents engage in conversations about examples of completed work that demonstrate what the child has achieved and what could be worked on next. They work together to set new goals for next learning steps.
Unassisted writing sample	The children independently complete a piece of writing without any help from the teacher.
Visual learning prompts	Displays of work or references that children can refer to as reminders or examples of past and current learning.
Wedge graphs	Schools can measure and display children' progress by tracking this progress wedge graph. The wedge graph shows if children read below, at, or above, their expected level.
Whole language	Whole language describes a literacy philosophy which emphasises that children should focus on meaning and strategy instruction when reading.