

Formative evaluation of the Principal Recruitment Allowance

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Executive summary

The Principal Recruitment Allowance

The Principal Recruitment Allowance (PRA) is an allowance available to boards of trustees in schools which face significant challenges and have a principal vacancy. Its purpose is to attract principals who will provide highly effective management and instructional leadership. Both schools and principals must meet detailed eligibility criteria. Eligible principals are paid an allowance of \$50,000 per annum for a fixed period of three years, which may be paid for a maximum of two further fixed periods of up to two years each (i.e., up to seven years in total). The PRA is funded by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry). The policy was announced in 2014, as a core element of Investing in Educational Success (IES), and the first appointment was made in mid-2015. At the start of this formative evaluation in March 2017, 25 schools had been approved to offer the allowance, and 13 principals were receiving it.

What the Ministry wanted to know

A formative evaluation seeks to understand how a programme is operating, and inform decision making aimed at improvement. This purpose shaped the three overarching evaluation questions:

1. To what degree is the PRA being implemented as planned?
2. How does the PRA design work in practice?
 - What is working well and why?
 - What is not working so well and why?
3. What changes can be made to design and implementation to strengthen the PRA?

This report covers all aspects of PRA design and implementation, divided into three key stages:

- The expression of interest, full application, and assessment against school eligibility criteria
- The appointment of a principal in approved schools, which may be with or without the PRA, depending on eligibility
- Support once a principal is in place.

Early in the evaluation we identified *areas for investigation* within each of these stages, and developed *focused evaluation questions* for each area. These are provided in Appendix 1 and are used to structure this report. This evaluation was not intended to explore or report outcomes from the PRA. A fourth evaluation question, related to how the outcomes of the PRA could be evaluated in the future, will be reported separately.

What we did

We took a qualitative approach for this formative evaluation, interviewing 53 people (all but seven face-to-face). Our approach was based around the school as a site for the PRA, nested within a region. We wanted to explore how the PRA was operationalised in these different sites. A purposive sample of 12 schools was selected. People that we knew to have involvement with the PRA process for each school were then invited to participate in the evaluation. These included: principals; chairs of boards of trustees; commissioners or limited statutory managers; directors of education, education managers, and senior advisors at Ministry area offices; Education Review Office (ERO) review service managers; New Zealand School Trustees Association (NZSTA) advisors; and the chair of the New Appointments National Panel (NANP). We also invited representatives from sector organisations to share their perspective on the PRA implementation. Interviews took place between 20 April and 16 June 2017.

Key findings

Application and approval (school level)	Key findings
Knowledge and use of the PRA, relative to other supports for schools most in need	<p>The intent of the PRA policy is well understood and interviewees were positive about it as a response to supporting schools. Interviewees framed their discussion of the PRA within the wider issue of principal supply and the need to support principals after appointment.</p> <p>The Ministry area offices have taken the lead in identifying schools that could apply to offer the PRA. The knowledge that senior advisors and education managers have of their 'patch' is important in ensuring the 'right schools' get the PRA at the 'right time'.</p>
School eligibility criteria and the application process	<p>The school eligibility criteria were well understood, and supported area offices to put forward applications that were likely to be approved (although early in the policy there were more applications declined as area offices became more familiar with the criteria and the process). However, senior advisors found the process time consuming. They suggested it could be made easier to access the data required for the application, and that exemplars would be helpful.</p>
Assessment of applications	<p>The assessment of applications and the operation of the National Assessment Group for the PRA is perceived to be straightforward and credible. Ministry staff in area offices were positive about the opportunity to speak to their case.</p>
Support for schools when applications are unsuccessful	<p>Interviewees had limited experience of unsuccessful applications, either because there had not been any in their area, or because they were unaware of them. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to directly engage with schools in this situation.</p>
Principal appointment	Key findings
Selection processes	<p>The New Appointment National Panel (NANP) is supportive and enabling in nearly all contexts. More consideration could be given to how it operates in Māori medium settings. (We understand that recent additions to the panel may have addressed this).</p>

Principal criteria	<p>Principal applicants we spoke with understood the selection process and eligibility criteria in relation to the PRA.</p> <p>The balance of national and local selection criteria was unproblematic for boards. Most schools had candidates that met the PRA eligibility criteria but a third of boards have appointed a principal who is not eligible for the PRA (usually a first time principal).</p>
Applicants	Overall, schools are more able to attract highly effective principals than before. Principals consider multiple things when deciding whether to apply for a position. Many described the PRA as a 'hook' or an 'enabler'.
After appointment	Key findings
Briefing to principal about school context	Most principals know enough about the school context, challenges and issues when they apply for the position.
Support	<p>Principals get personal support from their existing networks (not always local to their current position) and most (but not all) feel well supported by the relationship with their Ministry of Education senior advisor. A clear and strong finding from this formative evaluation is that principals need to be able to readily mobilise available support that targets the highest priority needs in their school context.</p> <p>The parts of the policy intended to encourage cross agency working are not happening consistently in practice. The most obvious example of this is the cross-organisational meeting within three months of appointment. The purpose and process around this meeting (e.g., who should attend) needs to be clarified. ERO's role in schools with a PRA principal is not clearly articulated in policy documentation and Ministry guidance. ERO is clear about "stepping back" to a liaison role, but principals' and boards' experiences of this is variable. Some would like ERO to have a clearer and stronger role in schools with a principal receiving the PRA. NZSTA's role in the PRA processes appears to be minimal.</p>
Accountability	We heard a strong sense of personal responsibility from principals, but little focus on any additional accountability for boards because of the PRA. Annual reporting requirements are not being met by all schools that had appointed a PRA principal.
Criteria and processes for allowance continuation	There is not a good understanding of the process for PRA allowance continuation, with everyone taking a 'wait and see' approach.
Laying a foundation for success	<p>Whether they had been in position for over a year or just a term, it was clear that principals were prioritising where they put their energy, whilst also focusing attention on multiple areas at once. Common actions were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • strengthening teacher capability, including working through competency procedures • refocusing on learning and strengthening pedagogy and curriculum • rebuilding systems and processes • strengthening or repairing relationships with the community including iwi • building relationships with and between students • addressing property issues.

To what degree is the PRA being implemented as planned?

The PRA is largely being implemented as planned. The two-stage eligibility process is well understood and is operating as intended, to identify schools with a principal vacancy and significant challenges, and to attract high quality principals to these schools. Interviewees are positive about the appointments that have been made (including those where principals are not eligible for the PRA) and the early signs of change in schools.

How does the PRA work in practice and where can it be strengthened?

We highlight the following aspects of the PRA implementation that are working well.

- The role of the senior advisor bringing close knowledge of their portfolio to identify schools for which the PRA would be an appropriate solution.
- The assessment of school applications by the National Assessment Group.
- The role of the NANP in supporting boards with recruitment and providing independent advice on principal eligibility for the PRA.
- Principals' awareness of school context and challenges. It appears that the inclusion of the PRA in an advertisement prompts candidates to ensure they understand the school context.

There are two main areas where the PRA implementation could be strengthened. The first is the level of connection between organisations, most notably the Ministry and ERO. This is strong at the national level (collaboration on the National Assessment Group), but is not being operationalised consistently. Strengthening the purpose and process of the cross-organisational meeting within three months of a principal's appointment would support this.

The second area is the support for principals after appointment, in all schools approved to offer the PRA, whether or not the principal is receiving the allowance. Research on school development recognises that schools do not operate in isolation, and that external support, including funding, plays an important role (Wylie, 2012; Wylie & Mitchell, 2003). The finding that schools need to be able to readily mobilise available support matched to their priority concerns is consistent with the evidence that "the most effective and efficient forms of external support start with accurate identification of individual school needs and timely matching of external expertise and resources with those needs" (Wylie, 2012, p. 13). Strengthening the support for schools after a principal is appointed could also include clarifying ERO's role. The support for boards in PRA schools may also need to be strengthened, with a clearer role for NZSTA.

Other aspects of PRA implementation that could be considered are:

- Improvements to data management, access to data analysts, and provision of exemplars to support area offices with PRA applications.
- The capacity for the NANP to operate in Māori medium settings.
- Mechanisms to support boards to meet annual reporting requirements.
- Clarification of the process for decisions about allowance continuation.

1. Background and methodology

The PRA

The Principal Recruitment Allowance (PRA) is an allowance available to boards of trustees in schools which face significant challenges and have a principal vacancy. The policy is intended to get experienced, effective principals into schools where they are needed the most. A two-stage process operates:

- 1) the identification of schools with significant challenges (and a current principal vacancy), followed by
- 2) assessment of candidates to ensure that recipients of the allowance have evidence of being highly effective principals.

First time principals are not the target for the policy, and would only meet the criteria in exceptional circumstances. A board may still appoint a first time principal or another principal who does not meet the eligibility criteria, but the PRA would not then be paid. Eligible principals are paid an allowance of \$50,000 per annum for a fixed period of three years, which may be paid for a maximum of two further fixed periods of up to two years each (i.e., up to seven years in total).

Summary of applications

The PRA is funded by the Ministry of Education (the Ministry) and was announced in 2014, as a core element of Investing in Educational Success (IES). The first appointment was made in mid-2015.

The first stage in an application is an expression of interest from a school's board of trustees. This is then followed by an application for consideration, written by the Ministry area office. At the time this evaluation began in late March 2017, 43 expressions of interest had been received from boards of trustees; and 33 of these led to an application for consideration that was assessed by the National Assessment Group. Nine expressions of interest were withdrawn prior to being assessed by the National Assessment Group (i.e., an application for consideration was not made), and one was pending.

Of the 33 applications assessed by the National Assessment Group, 25 were approved to recruit with the PRA, and 8 were declined. This formative evaluation focuses on schools that were approved to recruit with the allowance. It was beyond the scope to directly include schools with

applications that were either declined or withdrawn, but we did ask about these in our interviews with Ministry area office staff and other stakeholders.

The purpose of the evaluation

To understand the implementation of this new initiative, the Ministry commissioned a formative evaluation of the PRA to:

- describe how the PRA works in practice and assess the factors important to successful implementation
- support improvements to the design, implementation and monitoring of the PRA.

The high-level evaluation questions for the formative evaluation were:

1. To what degree is the PRA being implemented as planned?
2. How does the PRA design work in practice?
 - a) What is working well and why?
 - b) What is not working so well and why?
3. What changes can be made to design and implementation to strengthen the PRA?

The Ministry is also looking ahead to plan for a future outcomes evaluation of the PRA. Alongside the formative evaluation we have considered desired outcomes from the PRA and how these might be evaluated. This will be reported separately.

Areas for investigation and focused evaluation questions

The report covers all aspects of PRA design and implementation, across three key stages:

1. The expression of interest, full application, and assessment against school eligibility criteria
2. The appointment of a principal in approved schools, which may be with or without the PRA, depending on principal eligibility
3. Support once a principal is in place.

Early in the evaluation we identified *areas for investigation* within each of these stages, and developed *focused evaluation questions* for each area. These are provided in Appendix 1.

The three PRA stages and the areas for investigation are used to structure this report.

Our approach

We took a qualitative approach for this formative evaluation, which allowed us to gain rich, in-depth information about people's experiences of the PRA. Our approach was based around the

school as a site for the PRA, nested within a Ministry area. We wanted to explore how the PRA was operationalised in these different sites. A purposive sample of 12 schools was selected, from five of the 10 Ministry areas. People that we knew to have involvement with the PRA process for each area were then invited to participate in the evaluation.

School selection

At the start of the evaluation in March 2017, 25 schools had been approved to offer a PRA; 13 schools had appointed a principal receiving the PRA, and seven schools had been approved to do so, but had appointed a principal who was not eligible to receive the PRA (the other five had not yet appointed). We selected a purposeful sample designed to provide maximum variation on our dimensions of interest (Patton, 2002). The first priority for inclusion in the evaluation was schools that appointed a principal receiving the allowance; the second priority was schools that were approved to offer the PRA, but appointed an ineligible principal. We also aimed to get variation around:

- geographical location (large urban/minor urban/rural)
- school sector (primary, secondary, composite)
- school size
- length of time since the principal was appointed.

Our purposeful sample was also informed by discussion with the National Assessment Group, and consideration of the evaluation budget. We therefore took a geographically clustered approach, and included (with one exception) all schools approved to offer the PRA in five of the 10 Ministry of Education regional areas. We did not include schools with other application pathways (i.e., schools whose applications were not approved, or schools that withdrew during the process), but did ask about these in our interviews with Ministry area office staff and other stakeholders.

Prior to making any contact with schools or other stakeholders to invite them to participate in the evaluation we contacted the Director of Education in each of the Ministry areas we planned to visit to give them more information about the evaluation and let them know we were inviting schools in their area to participate. We then approached principals and board chairs in 12 schools and invited them to participate in the evaluation. Eleven schools agreed. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the 11 participating schools.

Table 1 **Characteristics of schools that participated in the evaluation**

Characteristic		No. of schools
PRA status	Appointed with the PRA	8
	Appointed without the PRA	3
Sector	Primary	3
	Secondary	5
	Composite	3
Size	<100	2
	101–300	4
	301+	5
Population classification	Urban	5
	Minor or secondary urban	4
	Rural	2
Principal start date	2015	3
	2016	7
	2017	1

Interviewees

A range of people associated with each of the selected schools, and who had some involvement with the PRA, were approached separately by NZCER to obtain informed consent to be interviewed. These included:

- the principal
- the chair of the board of trustees
- a commissioner or limited statutory manager (if applicable)
- staff at the Ministry area office (director of education, manager education, senior or lead advisor with responsibility for each selected school)
- Education Review Office review service managers
- New Zealand School Trustees Association advisors
- the chair of the New Appointments National Panel (NANP).

We also invited representatives from sector organisations (e.g., teacher and principal organisations and professional associations) to share their perspective on the PRA implementation.

Table 2 shows the number of interviewees in each group. In total we invited 58 people to participate, and spoke with 53 of them. We got good coverage across roles in all five areas. In Ministry area offices, all but one director delegated to an education manager, and we spoke with senior or lead advisors for most of the schools we were visiting. In two schools we were not able to speak with the board chair; we spoke with three statutory appointees who had fulfilled either

commissioner or limited statutory manager roles in a school or schools approved to offer the PRA. We spoke with a few people associated with the PRA in a Māori-medium context, but this is one aspect that may need greater attention in the future.

Table 2 **Number of people interviewed, by role**

Interviewee	Number	
Principal	Appointed with the PRA	8
	Appointed without the PRA	3
Board chair		8
Statutory appointees		3
Ministry of Education	Director (area office)	1
	Manager education (area office)	4
	Senior/lead advisor (area office)	7
	Other (national office and the NANP)	3
ERO	National and regional	5
NZSTA	National and regional	5
Sector organisations	National	6
Total		53

Time frame

The data for this evaluation was collected over a relatively short time between 20 April and 16 June 2017. This included the 2-week school holiday period in April in which contact with school staff is limited, and the first week of term which is typically a very busy time in schools. Interviews with some non-school based stakeholders were able to be carried out in this time, but all the school visits were made between 9 May and 1 June 2017.

Interviews

This qualitative evaluation was based on individual in-depth interviews with 53 people. To recognise the importance of building trust, and engaging in respectful and mana-enhancing relationships with evaluation participants (Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association, 2011) we visited each setting in person to undertake face-to-face interviews. The evaluation team ensured that a fluent te reo speaker was available to support the interview process in Māori-medium settings. This was appreciated by participants. Interviews with seven sector stakeholders, who were not in the areas we visited were carried out by telephone.

Interview guides were developed using questions mapped against the areas for investigation that had been agreed in the evaluation plan. These guides provided a framework for semi-structured, conversational interviews. This approach allowed us to explore areas for investigation

consistently across interviewees, whilst allowing space and time for issues specific to the individual.

Most of the interviews were carried out by two evaluators, with one leading the conversation, and one typing a full set of notes. This method was efficient, and effective in capturing an accurate record of the interview, with both evaluators being able to check and clarify their understanding of the conversation immediately afterwards. Given the relatively short time frame, some interviews were scheduled at the same time, and in these cases where only one evaluator was available, the interviews were recorded and notes made later after listening to the recording.

Document review

Background documentation about the PRA initiative, Ministry and ERO guidance, and file information for schools were reviewed to contribute to our knowledge of PRA design and implementation.

Analysis and reporting

Our approach was based around the school as a site for the PRA, and some initial analysis of data was done at this level to understand how the PRA had been operationalised in each context. What also became apparent was how the Ministry area office also operated as a site for the operationalisation of the PRA, in particular around the application process and support following principal appointment. We explored contextual similarities and differences. However, it was not our intention to report case studies of PRA implementation.

Analysis has focused on identifying themes for each of the areas for investigation. Any examples used are drawn from a number of sites. In this report we use terms such as all, many, most, some, and a few to describe strengths of themes, but only rarely quantify the qualitative data. There are also instances where a theme was only mentioned by one or two interviewees, but because of its nature we consider it to be worthy of attention.

We have done our utmost to ensure that schools and individuals are not recognisable. One of the analytical challenges has been to keep in view important aspects of each school context that are part of their 'PRA story', whilst honouring our commitment to participants that they would not be identifiable in any reporting.

2. Application and approval

The school-level application and approval process encompasses an expression of interest made by the board, an application for consideration (against the school eligibility criteria) completed by the Ministry area office, and assessment of the application by the National Assessment Group.

Knowledge and use of the PRA

Focus questions

To what extent is the role of the PRA, relative to other supports for schools most in need, clearly defined and understood?

Is the PRA effectively targeted to schools in greatest need? Are there schools that could be applying and aren't?

Are schools proactively applying for the allowance?

Is the PRA selected as an appropriate response for school circumstances?

The intent of the policy is well understood and mostly viewed positively

As part of this formative evaluation we wanted to understand how well the PRA policy was understood. We asked interviewees in many different roles what they thought the policy was intended to achieve. Notwithstanding a few reservations, all interviewees were positive about the intent of the PRA, which was understood to be about encouraging experienced, high quality principals to work in schools with significant challenges. Underlying this was an assumption that these principals would not have been likely to apply for these roles if the advertisement had not included the PRA. We explore this later in the report when we consider principals' motivations and what attracted them to the position. The following quotes are illustrative of how interviewees articulated the policy intent.

It's one way of turning people's heads towards schools that may need their expertise.
(principal)

I think it is trying to divert people away from a particular pathway [applying for positions in larger schools] and notice that there is something different that they hadn't thought of.
(principal)

Essentially my understanding of the PRA is to assist a school in the recruitment of a principal who will be effective in accelerating schooling improvement, especially around student achievement and sustained change in the school where to date there has been circumstances. (statutory appointee)

To make a difference to the culture and achievement and turn that around when they desperately need some good leadership. (sector organisation)

Board chairs, when asked about the intent of the policy, understandably focused on its operation in their own context.

For us it worked in attracting a principal who can make this successful. (board chair)

[I'm] extremely positive about the PRA. It's allowed us to appoint [name of principal]. (board chair)

Yes definitely the best thing about the PRA is the number and quality of the applicants we got – and we got the person we needed. If we hadn't had [principal] ... nothing much would have changed and that's a scary thought. (board chair)

I think the PRA's a great opportunity....The PRA made all the difference. And it's lifted up our community too. Not that they know about the PRA but they know he's here and he's being supported by the Ministry. (board chair)

Sitting alongside these positive perspectives on the PRA were comments about its limitations. The most mentioned of these was that the PRA put too great an emphasis on a leader alone “fixing” a school. Metaphors such as ‘parachuting’, ‘heroic leader’, ‘Messiah’, and ‘riding in on a white stallion’ were used negatively by interviewees to describe this. This is particularly an issue for principals not known to the school community.

I had to sort him out straight away and say. ‘We don't need saving, we know who we are’ ...I think he's the type of person that wants to come in and be the saviour. (board chair)

You cannot parachute an individual in to solve all the problems. It assumes that leadership is the only factor needed. (statutory appointee)

There was also a clear message that the paying of an allowance on its own is not enough, and that these principals need to be well supported to bring about change. This is discussed more fully in section 4 of this report.

The short version is, it's a good idea, and we do need something, but it wasn't quite there in terms of thinking it through – and that's mostly about that support – what does a principal in that environment need. There seems to be a bit of simplicity in the thinking around just giving someone some money and expecting them to solve the problems....the ‘heroic principal’. (sector organisation)

You cannot parachute a principal into a school and expect that \$50,000 will make a difference. Where schools have had under performance for a long time, property run down, community alienated, finance and debt—paying one person to come in and sort that is inept. (principal)

So it needs more thinking about what does a principal in a challenging environment really need. I think it's about that support. The resourcing to do stuff and also around mentoring....We do tend to isolate principals and then without the resources they need... expect them to [be successful]. (sector organisation)

Some interviewees observed that the PRA is not growing principal supply, and is just “moving the counters around” (i.e., taking a principal away from one school to support another) while not addressing the number or quality of principals available in the pool. Interviewees raised the identification of potential principals, and principal training in our conversations about the PRA.

I think there needs to be more explicit promotion of moving on into principalship...Identification of good leaders is at the moment very ad hoc. (principal)

A huge amount of work should be going into training our principals better – the training is nowhere near sufficient! [We are] really concerned about what there is for preparing principals, there aren't really any good programmes there. (sector organisation)

It's still appoint and hope...nobody prepares principals (NZSTA)

Others wondered whether the PRA may not be the right solution for all schools that meet the criteria, particularly those that are very isolated (because even \$50,000 may not attract principals to very isolated areas), or very small¹ (three interviewees suggested that the level of the allowance was not an appropriate solution for very small schools because of the value for investment). Although it was not an issue raised by many interviewees, a few pondered the broader value for investment of the PRA.

It's kind of expensive and rather inequitable, but it is an attempt to get good leadership into schools that need it, that motivation. (sector organisation)

I'm not convinced that actually it's the best use of the money. I'd be struggling to advocate it because I think there are more effective ways to be using the money. (statutory appointee)

There's significant money wrapped up in this initiative across a very small pool of people, so how are we showing that the money is worth the outcomes? (Ministry)

Related to the earlier point about principal supply, one principal suggested that the funding could be better used to support high quality training for principalship (e.g., paying fees for deputy principals undertaking a Masters in school leadership).

I think we've got the money around the wrong way... we need to grow the pool, not move people around in a limited pool. (principal)

Overall though, interviewees were positive about the PRA as one component of a system approach to supporting schools with significant challenges.

The Ministry advisor has a pivotal role in identifying schools

Ministry area office interviewees told us that they were usually the instigator of the PRA application process, rather than the school proactively expressing interest. The role of the senior advisor with a close knowledge of their portfolio of schools was pivotal. One education manager

¹ Note that school size is not a criterion for school eligibility to offer the PRA, and there are small schools that have been approved.

described this as “a tight connection between advisors and schools...so we know instinctively if it is likely to meet the criteria”. A senior advisor described the Ministry as “the strong influencing leader to make the case”.

Most board chairs who had been involved in the school application for the PRA (some had not been on the board at the time and did not have this knowledge) concurred that the board had heard about the PRA from their Ministry advisor. We heard a couple of instances where a board had not initially been happy about the suggestion, but had come to understand what it could do for the school.

[It was] suggested by our Ministry advisor. We weren't happy about it as a board. We wanted the person to come regardless of what the salary was. We didn't want them to be enticed because there was money associated. We wanted them to come because of the school and the students. We know xxx is a hard school, no doubt about it. ...[But after more conversations with the Ministry] the board put out that it wasn't what we wanted, but we want the best person and if it helps us reach the goal of that, we should all be wanting it. (board chair)

One board chair had also heard about the PRA from Te Runanga Nui O Ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori, and another had been proactive in finding out about the PRA as part of the broader Investing in Educational Success initiative.

I had read about IES early made myself aware of the industrial background and context of what it could do....I recognised it as something that could save the college. (board chair)

In just a few instances interviewees from other agencies had been involved in discussions about the PRA prior to an application being made.

I was working quite closely with the Ministry here and had a working group session to think about support for this school and others. We knew they would meet criteria. (NZSTA)

We knew the history of the school so well and had been talking to the Ministry for years about how to solve the problem of [school]....We've always had a good relationship with the Ministry [here]....They used our findings in going to national Ministry to apply for the PRA. We fast tracked the review report so that could happen. (ERO)

On the whole, the PRA is targeted to schools in greatest need

We asked Ministry interviewees if they thought there were schools that could be applying for the PRA, but weren't. The main message was that the schools with the highest needs that also have a principal vacancy have applied. There was a sense in most areas that education managers and/or directors are 'filtering' and supporting applications that clearly meet the criteria and are therefore likely to be approved. This is partly because of the level of work involved in the application. There was only one instance where we heard of a difference in view between a director and the education manager or senior advisor on whether an application should be supported.

We also realised at that time it was critical to have the director’s agreement....We had another couple we feel we had evidence that they would benefit from a PRA, but these did not have the support of the director. (Ministry)

A few interviewees (a director of education, a statutory appointee, and an ERO regional services manager, all from different areas) thought there were “probably” a small number of schools that could be applying and aren’t yet. The interviewee from ERO worked across more than one Ministry office and considered there was variability in knowledge about the PRA and whether it might be helpful for a school. We also heard in all regions about schools that might apply if the current principal left—as one senior advisor put it, “the schools are there, but the principals aren’t moving”.

School eligibility criteria

Focus questions

How well have the school eligibility criteria worked in practice in helping areas offices to identify schools?

Are the criteria clear for boards and Ministry area offices?

The school eligibility criteria are clear and work well in practice

At the time this evaluation began in late March 2017, 43 expressions of interest had been received from boards of trustees:

- 25 expressions led to an application for consideration assessed by the National Assessment Group, and schools were approved to recruit with the allowance
- 8 expressions of interest moved to an application for consideration assessed by the National Assessment Group, but the application was declined
- 9 expressions of interest were withdrawn prior to being assessed by the National Assessment Group (i.e., an application for consideration was not made)
- 1 was pending.

Those declined came from three of the 10 Ministry areas, and were weighted towards the early months of the policy (6 out of 8 were applications in the first year, up to April 2015). It appears that the Ministry area offices developed a clearer understanding of how the school eligibility criteria were assessed and what would be approved. The monitoring data shows that applications were withdrawn for a number of different reasons including the Ministry area office not supporting the application, unresolved employment issues, or the school deciding to move ahead with recruiting without a PRA. A reason is not always recorded in the monitoring data. (For ongoing monitoring, it would be useful to record reasons).

Ministry area office interviewees had little to say about the school eligibility criteria (see Figure 1). It was well understood and supported them to put forward applications that were likely to be approved.

Our director of education is really clear about the criteria... so we don't tend to put up something that we think is a longshot, we have a really strong rationale for why we're putting them up. (Ministry)

Figure 1 **School eligibility criteria**

To be eligible to offer the allowance a school is required to have a current principal vacancy and must meet a range of the following criteria as assessed by the Secretary in order to be eligible to offer the allowance:

- significant underachievement, particularly for those students most at risk of underachieving (Māori students, Pasifika students, students with special education needs and students from low socio-economic families)
- student achievement is well below the average achievement for 'like' schools and evidence over time shows that there has been little or no improvement.
- Education Review Office reports indicate a one to two year review, often with repeated review office visits
- a history of statutory interventions (progress is minimal or not sustained such that the identified issues that created the original need for a statutory intervention remain)
- serious problems with student/staff safety and/or well-being
- there has been high principal turnover with, for example, two or three principals within the past five years
- significant financial issues which have put the school at financial risk
- extraordinary circumstances; for example, the school has had significant problems and negative public attention which has led to the loss of the principal, undermined the confidence and culture of the school and distracted the school from a focus on its key educational purpose. This criterion may be sufficient on its own to justify the allowance.

Note: the term 'student achievement' is understood to mean "valued outcomes as set out in The New Zealand Curriculum and/or Te Marautangā o Aotearoa and/or Te Aho Matua o ngā Kura Kaupapa Māori o Aotearoa and/or Te Piko o to Mahuri including student achievement" to ensure there is a broad understanding of evidence of student progress and achievement.

Advisors in one area office questioned the criterion relating to high principal turnover, suggesting that schools with "a long serving ineffective principal" should also be considered. (We understand that schools in this position have been approved if they meet other criteria).

Sometimes the fact that a principal has been there forever is a negative, not a positive. (Ministry)

The application process

Focus questions

Do changes need to be made to the application form?

How complex and resource intensive is the application process from the area office perspective? What do they say about national office support?

What is the relationship between the area office and the school (the board) in preparing the application? How complex and resource intensive is the application process from the board perspective?

The application process is time consuming for senior advisors

The most common message from senior advisors was that writing the application was time consuming. This was particularly the case for the first application made by each office, but even subsequent applications were intensive and time consuming. Those who had contacted national office with questions had received good support. Issues were raised about the availability and management of school-level data. One issue highlighted was that accurate data may not always be available as one of the reasons it is being considered as a PRA school is that it “it hasn’t been operating in an honest and open environment where information has been accurate and freely available”.

While there is not a call for changes to be made to the form itself, Ministry area offices say they would benefit from:

- easier access to data analyst support
- better data management systems so school-level data are held in one place
- exemplars of completed, successful applications.

Board chairs do not play much of a role in making the full application

Board chairs we spoke with had had little involvement with the full application. Most were happy with this process and their level of involvement.

Not very complex. Just filled out the [expression of interest] form. It didn’t take long to hear that it had been approved. (board chair)

Just one would have liked greater involvement.

The board felt sidelined in the process. We weren’t a partner in the PRA process. The actual application was led by the Ministry who didn’t involve us, and we wanted to be involved. We, the board, knew nothing about what was going on! When I would ask where are we at with this process, I got a ‘don’t worry everything’s all right’. (board chair)

Assessment of applications

Focus questions

What has been the buy-in from the sector for the school eligibility criteria and application processes (including the operation of the National Assessment Group) – how credible are they perceived to be?
How well does the assessment process work in practice?

The National Assessment Group is credible and works well in practice

We asked a range of interviewees about the assessment of applications and the operation of the National Assessment Group. This group comprises representatives from different parts of the Ministry's national office and from ERO. This part of the process is viewed positively. Senior advisors in area offices were appreciative of the opportunity to speak to their 'case' directly by joining the National Assessment Group in a teleconference.

Speaking to it at national office was really powerful. Because you know your case and you've ordered your thinking to write it. (Ministry)

The assessment group work well and ask good questions. (Ministry)

Meetings have been efficient and focused on how the decision needs to be made. (ERO)

Support for schools when applications are unsuccessful

Focus question

Do schools whose applications are unsuccessful get appropriate support?

We have limited information about support for schools whose applications are unsuccessful

The people we spoke with had very limited experience of unsuccessful applications, either because there had not any in their area, or because they were unaware of them. It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to directly engage with schools in this situation. One area office where interviewees knew of unsuccessful applications for the PRA highlighted the need for boards to be well supported in the recruitment process.

Schools that still have community boards of trustees need to be supported in the recruitment and appointment process, perhaps through an objective appointment committee, as these communities are often small and it's more about 'who knows who' than really finding the person with the necessary skills to lead. (Ministry)

3. Principal appointment

When a school has been approved to offer the PRA, the advertisement for a principal will include the wording “A successful applicant may be eligible for the Principal Recruitment Allowance of up to \$50,000”. Boards are also allocated an independent advisor from the New Appointments National Panel (NANP) to assess whether the candidate(s) for the principal vacancy meet the principal eligibility criteria. We were interested in this aspect of the PRA implementation, as well as whether schools were more able to attract strong candidates.

Selection processes

Focus questions

How does the role of independent advisor from the New National Appointments Panel (NANP) work in practice?

To what extent does involvement in the process build board capability in role selection?

How does the balance of national (PRA) and local (board) criteria play out for schools that appoint with or without the PRA?

How clear and useful are the guidelines, tools, and supports for boards?

Selection processes are well supported by the NANP in nearly all contexts

The NANP oversees appointments to the across-community roles for Kāhui Ako | Communities of Learning, and for principals in schools approved to offer the PRA. The people we spoke with in English medium schools were positive about the role of the NANP, and clear about the intention of the panel, which is to affirm whether candidates meet the principal eligibility criteria, and to provide independent advice during the appointment process, but not contribute to the decision making (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 **The role of the NANP**

The independent adviser will:

- affirm to the board and the Ministry whether the candidate(s) for the principal vacancy have met or, where renewal is being considered, continue to meet the principal eligibility criteria
- provide independent, impartial, high quality and evidence-based input and advice during a board’s election and appointment process
- support capability building in role selection by modelling and articulating best practice in the assessment and evaluation of applications against the principal eligibility criteria.

The following quotes illustrate people's experiences of the NANP.

The NANP role was clear (statutory appointee)

We were still the selecting panel and she had her role. (board chair)

We heard that the panel found [NANP advisor] very helpful. They said 'She wasn't "red tape" but was about possibilities'. (Ministry)

She didn't influence us in any way. When we finally came to a decision, because we argued over two for a while, but once we'd decided, she just said we'd made the right decision. (board chair)

When we knew we had the PRA it was suddenly straightforward. [NANP advisor] is a fabulous person—easy and straightforward. She understood the reality of working in with the school. Rapid, on time, low key, checked out applicants, kept in touch....Helpful with all the material...required interview questions and processes. (board chair)

[NANP advisor] is down to earth and pragmatic....she has credibility. (board chair)

However, there is one context where we heard that the NANP role could be improved. The guidance states that as part of the approval process, it may be identified that particular skills are required of the NANP advisor. The example of fluency in te reo Māori is given. Our interviews with those involved with the selection process for a tumuaki in a Māori medium setting reinforce the importance of a NANP advisor having competency in te reo Māori and confidence to engage in Māori medium contexts². Interviewees suggest:

- Ensuring the advisor has built a relationship with the kura prior to the interview. This would ensure that everyone understood how the interview process would unfold (which may not be the same as in English medium schools), and their respective roles.
- Separating the PRA eligibility conversation from the job interview so that the tumuaki candidates can focus on talking to the board about the job, rather than addressing PRA principal eligibility criteria.
- Ensuring that the PRA principal criteria are applied flexibly enough to serve as an enabler not a barrier, given the small pool of experienced Māori medium tumuaki.

The involvement of external advisors builds board capability

As discussed above, in nearly all contexts board chairs were positive about the NANP role in selection processes, and their attendance at the principal interviews. Board chairs commented positively on the involvement of external advisors (either the NANP, statutory appointees, or other consultants) in the appointment process. This external support builds board capability.

Yes, it [NANP role] added something. (board chair)

² We understand that recent additions to the NANP increase the panel's capacity to provide this.

She gave us some advice and tips. We were concerned about [new principal's] community experiences or lack of in the Pasifika context. [NANP advisor] made a comment about looking overall – would [the new principal] be able to learn? This helped get things in perspective. (board chair)

The board didn't know anything about the PRA, and were keen for support – they really were relying on the specialist advisor. (NZSTA)

[Consultant] made a huge impact on us. [S/he has] given us the room to operate as a board. (board chair)

We did not hear much about the NZSTA role in supporting selection processes. One NZSTA interviewee suggested that it could be that they were less likely to be needed, given the role of the NANP advisor and often an external consultant, saying “there is actually more help for boards in the appointment process [with a PRA]”.

The balance of national and local selection criteria was unproblematic

One of the things we were interested in was how the balance of national (PRA) and local (board) selection criteria played out for boards as they went through the selection process. This didn't emerge as an issue in our conversations. One board chair described the criteria as “fitting together”; another considered that:

It [the PRA criteria] didn't make any difference to how we thought about the applicants. We were looking for someone who could make things change. (board chair)

Principal eligibility criteria

Focus question(s)

Do principal applicants understand the selection and appointment process, and eligibility criteria in relation to the PRA?

Do eligible schools end up using the allowance? If not, why not?

Do they find candidates that meet the eligibility criteria?

Principals understood the selection process and eligibility criteria in relation to the PRA

Principal applicants we spoke with understood the selection process and eligibility criteria in relation to the PRA (see Figure 3). Those who were ineligible were more likely to comment on the time put into the paperwork requested by the NANP, but mostly appreciated the opportunity to provide evidence against the criteria and be considered for the allowance.

Figure 3 **Principal eligibility criteria**

In addition to the usual requirements for appointment to a principal's position, applicants for the principal vacancy for which the allowance may be offered must meet a range of the following criteria:

- can provide evidence of successful performance reviews as a principal
- has had experience working with diverse learners and demonstrates a commitment in his/her current school to ensuring a culturally responsive environment
- has had experience in 'turning around' a challenging school. This would include evidence of a number of the following:
 - significantly raising student achievement
 - changing community perceptions, such as evidenced by stabilising the school roll
 - moving a school from an Education Review Office one-to-two year review to at least a three-year review
 - improving the school's finances (or maintaining a sound financial base over time)
 - working with the board to move the school out of statutory intervention
 - change has been embedded or sustained in a challenging school (if appropriate)

and (in their current school):

- student achievement shows evidence of accelerated progress and/or better student achievement outcomes when compared with 'like' schools
- recognised as working positively with current staff and board to set, communicate and monitor learning goals and targets
- Education Review Office report indicates at least a three-year review
- there are no identified significant financial issues
- is able to demonstrate experience in aligning resources (staffing and financial) to priority goals and targets
- has worked to ensure there is an orderly environment both in and outside the classrooms and there is no evidence of serious problems with student safety
- there is no evidence of serious problems with staff welfare and safety
- has worked to ensure there is a constructive and collaborative work environment
- can provide evidence (possibly from a 360 degree appraisal or referees reports) of personal characteristics including:
 - being respected by their profession
 - being an effective communicator
 - having strong engagement with their school community
 - the ability to build relational trust as evidenced by having positive professional relationships with current staff and board members
 - the ability to nurture talent, especially with senior leadership team
- has been involved in recent professional learning and development alongside staff members at current school
- is capable of encouraging succession to keep the changes sustainable.

When a candidate is unable to provide evidence they meet particular criteria they will need to demonstrate evidence of equivalent experience to those criteria. *Note: In exceptional circumstances a candidate who is not a principal but who has current senior management experience and meets a range of the other principal eligibility criteria may be approved by the Secretary to receive the allowance.*

Most schools attract candidates that meet the eligibility criteria but a third of boards have appointed a principal who is not eligible for the PRA

The NANP has a more complete picture of candidates that meet the eligibility criteria than we were able to gain from this evaluation. However, in the contexts we can report on, most had candidates that met the eligibility criteria, and many had multiple candidates who did so. We did not visit any schools that have been approved to offer a PRA but have not been able to appoint a principal.

So far, seven schools that were approved to recruit with the PRA have appointed a principal who is not eligible for the allowance, most commonly a first time principal. We spoke with three of these principals in the evaluation. The importance of the board appointing the candidate judged to be the strongest candidate and the best fit for the school was acknowledged by interviewees across a range of roles.

Applicants

Focus questions

Are schools most in need more able to attract highly effective principals to existing vacancies than previously?
What motivations do principals have to apply?

Overall, schools are more able to attract highly effective principals

We asked board chairs if they thought that offering the PRA had made a difference to the pool of applicants, in either quantity or quality. Many had experience of previous recruitment and could reflect on this when responding to this question. We also asked interviewees from the Ministry, ERO, and NZSTA for their views on whether the PRA was attracting applicants to schools in their area.

Of the eight board chairs and one statutory appointee we spoke with, six considered that offering the PRA had improved the pool of applicants (the other three were not sure).

Yes and yes [quantity and quality]. We had 13 real applications...and what it did attract was more than half were current principals. That's where it really worked. (board chair)

Yes absolutely, we wouldn't have found [this principal] if it wasn't for the PRA. I think there were six current principals who applied for this position and they wouldn't have been attracted without it. (board chair)

The number of applicants was better than expected. We got 15 applications – eight strong ones and three very strong! So it obviously worked. We interviewed five. (board chair)

In a few contexts, the board chair was less positive about the pool of applicants, but felt the PRA had contributed to the school getting a good principal, so had been successful.

There were a number that applied. I have to say I was a little disappointed. I was looking for a more experienced Māori person who could light this place up. There wasn't one. It didn't attract the right people from where I sat, I knew what I wanted and it didn't get what I wanted. But [new principal] is amazing. What I know now, is that we couldn't have got a better person. (board chair)

I don't think it did – we didn't have a big pool of applicants. On reflection if the one we appointed hadn't been in the mix I would have readvertised....But it is nice now to think we have the right person in place and that she gets a bit of a bonus or reward for the extra challenge. (statutory appointee)

The PRA is an enabler for principals to take up new positions

Principals consider multiple things when deciding whether to apply for a position. The contribution of the PRA as a motivating factor for principals was not usually clear-cut. However, we judge that the PRA influenced eight out of the 11 principals we spoke with. Three say they would not have applied for or taken up the position had they not been eligible for the PRA.

The PRA operated as a 'hook' or an 'enabler'. As a hook it drew principals' attention to a position they may not have considered. As an enabler it justified or enabled their decision to move location, or to a smaller school, or to a lower-paid position. These principals usually expressed other reasons why the position was attractive to them as well as the allowance, for example, the challenge of the position, or the commitment to working in lower decile schools. Another theme in principals' motivations was 'returning'. This included Māori principals returning home to an area where they have iwi affiliations, as well as Pākehā principals returning to a school where they have taught in the past, sometimes many years before. The PRA enabled principals to make this return.

4. After appointment

We were interested in how well prepared principals were for the challenge of their new role, how they approached it, and the nature and extent of support from the Ministry and other agencies. We also wanted to find out how well the expectations and obligations around receiving the PRA were understood.

Briefing to principal about school context and issues

Focus questions

What is the quality of information that principals receive about school context and issues prior to and after appointment?

How well prepared did the principals feel for their challenge – Is there information that principals needed in order to understand the school context and issues that they did not get?

Principals understand the school contexts and are prepared for the challenge

Most principals know enough about the school context, challenges and issues when they apply for a PRA position. This comes from a number of sources including the board, their own research, and local knowledge. No one suggested that there was information they needed and didn't get, or that this aspect of the process could be improved. Principals also acknowledge that the extent of challenge can't be fully known until they start.

I knew it very well. There was a good information pack plus it was plastered in the news media! (principal)

I had a good idea but even then I came in with too many assumptions about what I thought teachers were capable of. (principal)

[I was] not prepared for the extent of disarray. No system had been looked at since 2005....The board don't know what they don't know. (principal)

In a few contexts we heard about awkwardness for principals around receiving—or being perceived to receive—additional money. Interviewees reflected that there was the potential for negative perceptions for both PRA eligible principals (“here for the money”), and for ineligible principals (will they be “up to the job”?). Principals we spoke with who were not eligible for the PRA, had taken some time to realise that others (either staff or whānau) thought they were getting the allowance.

[I wasn't prepared for] half the community won't like you because they wanted the other candidate and they think you've got \$50,000 extra. (principal)

Building relational trust with the staff is your biggest job coming in and if [they think] there's money in the equation then it just makes your job harder. (principal)

The approval of a school to offer the PRA is public knowledge through being advertised in the Education Gazette. There has also been some media attention on 'PRA schools'. However, principal eligibility for the PRA is an individual employment matter, and therefore not public. How a board and principal choose to approach this with their community will depend on their context. It may be something that needs to be discussed at the time of appointment, or soon after, to allay negative reaction in the school community (either with staff or whānau).

Support for principals after appointment

Focus questions

What is the nature and extent of support from the local Ministry office once the principal is appointed? (includes principals appointed without the PRA)

What is the nature and extent of support from other agencies and organisations once the principal is appointed (ERO, NZSTA, Te Runanga Nui, Area Schools Association) (includes principals appointed without the PRA)

How does the cross-organisational meeting within three months of appointment work in practice?

Do principals think they have the support they need to change the school sustainably?

Principals find personal support

Principals usually found personal support from their own professional networks. Only two had a formal mentor, one paid for by the school, the other by the Ministry; two with a statutory appointee in place found this a useful support (although in other contexts, the relationship between the LSM and the principal was not always straightforward). In one region, the support of a principal advisor was appreciated. An interviewee from a sector organisation pondered during our discussion that the new MoE-paid leadership advisors only support beginning principals, and perhaps PRA principals should also be able to access this type of support.

Most principals feel well supported by the relationship with their senior advisor

Most principals were positive about the support they received from senior advisors at the Ministry, describing them as "very responsive", "peerless", and "tremendous". A director of education also underlined the importance of "having the right people in those roles who can really hear what is being said". However, there was variability across areas. We noticed that interviewees from different area offices used different language when talking about the PRA and

their relationship with the principals in PRA schools. We highlight two contexts, one where language is ‘can do’ and ‘enabling’; another where language is about ‘entitlement’.

As part of being a principal with a PRA we see what else we can do....We need all schools to succeed, but we have a strong interest in [these schools] succeeding and they have different challenges. (Ministry)

There isn't a week that goes by when I'm not in touch with these schools....There is no recipe for what is needed to support a PRA. They will tell us what they need and we need to be attentive and responsive. (Ministry)

In this area, the principals of PRA schools described the Ministry very positively.

Peerless. She is here within 20 minutes if I need her. (principal)

The really positive factor is the relationship with key Ministry people. Policy alone it would fail, but there have been responsive, open, curious people. It's the people that are the real win that must be highlighted. (principal)

Interviewees in another area office described how principals in PRA schools could “only get what they get” and that “it would make no difference from our perspective” (they suggested they would be more likely to notice a first time principal than a PRA principal). In this area, one principal described feeling “ignored” and another outlined two situations where they considered the Ministry was following process in a rigid way that led to delays in support (the details are not given to maintain anonymity).

I thought the Ministry could have done better by us and me. (principal)

We wonder whether these contrasting examples highlight the challenge that senior advisors have in supporting principals when resources are scarce and other schools in their region also have a high level of need. Another senior advisor (not from either of the regions in these examples) also described the challenge of having “no power” to provide a principal with things they were asking for, and how this could be “setting advisors up to fail” in their relationships with principals. We pick up more on the need principals have for mobilising support in the next section.

Principals in PRA approved schools need better access to resources to support them to bring about change

The need for more tangible support for PRA approved schools was a strong theme to emerge from this formative evaluation. We heard it from principals directly but it was reiterated by interviewees across all roles and organisations.

There is no deliberate support. [It's like] ‘Here's the lifeboat, but we won't give you any oars.’ (principal)

They are prepared to pay the principal extra but they don't fund the school to help it get out of difficulty....The board is having to fund things that the Ministry should be and that's not

fair. They wanted us to change and we've made the changes but it has cost extra. (board chair)

We expect them to be highly capable leaders, but no one should have to carry these schools on their own. (Ministry)

It cannot be done in isolation. PRA schools need a suite of resources....There are waves of things that need addressing. (Ministry)

A school in difficulty, they get a principal allowance, but nothing else. They need a new principal with a mentor and a mentor for a board – we try and do some of that but we don't have the coverage to do it all. (NZSTA)

A consistent message from interviewees was that PRA schools (irrespective of whether the principal was receiving the allowance or not) needed to be able to easily access and mobilise available support that targeted the highest priority areas for the school. Interviewees suggested these priorities were likely to include: streamlined access to PLD for staff, additional staffing for teachers or support staff, access to social workers, funding for updating resources, fast-tracking of property projects, and options for managing debt.

If I were to write the policy, I might give them some extra pay, but more importantly I would give them staffing, and time, the supports and the resources they need. And they often won't know what's needed until they're in the space – what do you need to make a difference in this school? [It might be] public health, board support, social workers, staff PD, assessment tools, connections with community, and all those. So they know they can do the work. (sector organisation)

If the school generates a PRA it should generate extra funding and FTEs, even in the short term...money does nothing per se but not having any stops you doing anything. (Ministry)

The position should come with a range of tools for the new principal to use...with minimal work to be able to access it. (principal)

ERO's role in schools with PRA principals could be clarified and strengthened

Nearly all of the schools approved to offer the PRA are on a 1 to 2 year longitudinal review prior to a new principal being appointed. When a principal who is eligible for the PRA starts, ERO interviewees described “going into a different process” and “stepping back”. If the principal is not eligible for the PRA, this process is not triggered.

What I understood was that in the school where that's in place, the IES resource is being put into the new principal as the proven change manager. Therefore we're not going to add to that resource through our evaluation process. Because it's assumed that people can advance things. (ERO)

ERO could then step back and have confidence in the board chair and in the principal. (ERO)

ERO's process for schools with a PRA principal involves preparing a report for the new principal, then moving into a liaison role. As part of that liaison it is intended that:

- the liaison review services manager (RSM) attends the scheduled 3-monthly meetings
- ERO meets with the principal on a schedule of regular liaison visits
- the RSM works with the principal and board to determine the most appropriate timing for an ERO review. The guidance suggests that "in some instances the principal may want an early review but it is more likely that he/she will want time to demonstrate the impact of their leadership across the outcome domains" (ERO guidance). It is suggested that this is most likely around 2 years into appointment.

Principals and boards have had varying experiences of this process, and the process is not well understood by everyone. Some principals were happy with their relationship with ERO. One principal had asked for a "normal published review", within a few terms of their appointment. This had put the school onto a 3-year cycle and indicators had shown considerable improvement. The principal described this as "a great injection of happiness". Another had negotiated a larger role for ERO involving regular visits. The ERO interviewee with knowledge of this school described how they had "made a decision not to have a lighter touch" in this particular context, and the principal described it as his "most robust form of support".

Others wanted ERO to have a stronger role that went beyond liaison, providing evaluative information to inform principals' actions, as well as evidence of progress and change.

I've been surprised that ERO haven't come back to us. We've seen them once. I'm not chasing them, I'm framing it as them confident that we're doing OK. (principal)

ERO have a really curious approach to this....They've taken a hands-off approach. They've met with me twice in the year and asked when do you want us to do a review....I don't want them to come in 2018 and find we have a problem. We want to be on a 3 year review cycle by then. (principal)

NZSTA's role in the PRA processes is minimal

The importance of a strong board was highlighted by some interviewees as part of supporting PRA principals to bring about change.

There's got to be a look at the governance of these schools and their capability. (sector organisation)

I think that if a school is in such a state that it needs a PRA then it should have a professional board. Pack everything else around it. That should come with the PRA. (principal)

We understand that when a school is approved to recruit with a PRA, NZSTA allocates an advisor to contact the board to offer help with the recruitment and appointment process, but that there is typically not an ongoing support role. We did not hear much about the role of NZSTA in our

interviews with principals and board chairs, but those few interviewees who did mention NZSTA had mostly had positive experiences.

I've had a lot to do with NZSTA. Mainly with [name] because we've been working on teacher issues. They've been really good to sound off against. (board chair)

I got support from NZSTA with advice about restructure. They didn't have all the information I needed, but the people were fantastic. (principal)

NZSTA, yes, they've been helpful, not so much since the appointment was made, but a bit before that....I know they are there and they are supportive and I know they are ready to put in support once I finish that mentoring role for the new board. (statutory appointee)

The purpose and process around the cross-organisational meeting within three months of appointment needs to be clarified

The PRA guidance intends for the Ministry, ERO and NZSTA to work together to support schools with a PRA principal. For example, the ERO internal process states:

It is useful to establish contact with the Ministry senior advisor and the NZSTA person reasonably early in the process so that the support relationship is apparent from the beginning of the appointment. These are the people who will be at the three monthly meetings concerning the school's progress. (ERO guidance)

The strength of relationships between Ministry area offices, ERO and NZSTA, appears to be variable. We did hear examples where these relationships were well-established.

We have a good relationship with the Ministry. We meet 6 weekly. We have different roles to play, and can share information (ERO)

[We're] lucky that we have a well-established relationship with Ministry managers and ERO. We come together once a month to discuss schools' needs in the region and if ERO has any concerns. It's a close relationship. (NZSTA)

One of the requirements of the PRA is that a cross-organisational meeting is held within three months of principal appointment to discuss what support options may be appropriate for the school. An information sheet on this is available in the suite of PRA guidance. None of the 11 principals or eight board chairs we spoke with thought this meeting had happened. Without more knowledge of the purpose of this meeting, they were unsure how helpful it would be.

One senior advisor had had this meeting with a principal not participating in this evaluation. However, she found the purpose of the meeting confusing, and was unclear whether it was for support or reviewing how things were going. Our conversations with other senior advisors and education managers confirmed a lack of clarity about the purpose of the meeting, and how it enhanced their role and relationship with schools. This lack of clarity was also evident for ERO and NZSTA interviewees.

I don't know why they wrote that. There isn't a week that goes by when I'm not in touch with these schools. (Ministry)

[The three month meetings] may have been happening. Should we be at the table? That's one of our questions. We haven't been so far. (ERO)

[I] didn't know about this but it could potentially include STA. (NZSTA)

Accountability

Focus question(s)

Do boards understand their obligations? How do these work in practice?

Do principals understand the expectations and obligations for receiving the PRA? How do these work in practice?

Board obligations appear to be viewed as 'business as usual'

The conditions of approval for the PRA set out things the board must do in relation to offering the allowance. Many of these relate to recruitment and appointment and have been explored already in this report (e.g., including an advisor from the NANP in the recruitment process, ensuring all applicants are aware of eligibility criteria). The NANP supports boards with many of these requirements.

Board chairs we spoke with did not have much to say about obligations in relation to the PRA. There was a sense that that once the principal was appointed it was 'business as usual' in terms of performance agreements and appraisals.

What you'd do anyway, but have to report towards the end of that three year period. (board chair)

We understand that most boards are not meeting the requirement to "report annually to the Ministry on progress against the issues presenting at the time the allowance was approved" (PRA example conditions of approval). There is an email template for education managers to draw a board's and principal's attention to this on the appointment anniversary, but the area office role in this aspect of the PRA did not feature in our discussions.

Principals have a strong sense of personal responsibility

Principals described a strong sense of personal integrity and responsibility in their new roles. This was more evident than a focus on expectations and obligations in terms of accountability.

There's lots of pushing yourself as a leader to ensure the school gets the best out of it...it comes with obligations. (principal)

Making a difference in this community is what I'd do with or without the PRA. (principal)

Criteria and processes for allowance continuation

Focus question

To what extent are the criteria and processes for allowance continuation understood?

Figure 4 **Process of review for a board**

Three-to-six months prior to the expiry of the initial three-year fixed period or subsequent renewal of the allowance the board will use its annual self-reviews and principal appraisals to consider whether to seek approval from the Secretary to renew the allowance for a further fixed period.

As part of the same review an independent adviser from the National Panel will assess:

- the principal's role in progressing/meeting the agreed goals and targets for change
- whether the principal is still meeting the allowance expectations including the eligibility criteria, and
- provide a quality assurance check of the board's self-review process.

The board submits an application to the Secretary seeking approval to continue offering the allowance for a further fixed term of up to two years (subject to the maximum of two renewals). The application in renewing the allowance will include affirmation from the independent adviser whether or not the principal continues to meet the principal eligibility criteria and providing feedback of the board's self-review.

There is limited understanding about the process for allowance continuation

Most interviewees did not have a clear understanding of what happens at the end of the first three years of the allowance, and were taking a “wait and see” approach. Although the process is laid out in guidance (see Figure 4), there was some confusion about whether both the school eligibility and principal eligibility was reviewed, and how this review would actually occur. Some expressed concern that a school might lose a principal if the allowance wasn't continued.

It needs to be in place for the whole period of appointment. (sector organisation)

Yes it would be pointless to get someone like [principal] in here for 3 years and turn the ship around and thenyou still need someone to keep the ship going in that direction! (board chair)

Well there's all sorts of possible scenarios that might happen. Going back to a normal salary is a significant drop, so we don't know. (statutory appointee)

Imagine if the Ministry tried saying, okay, you can keep doing the same job but we're going to take \$50,000 off you! (principal)

I suppose, well the principal is permanent, but like any change manager they are there to put themselves out of a job! So that is actually what they should be doing – but it can be seen as a penalty for doing a good job. (NZSTA)

Conversely, Ministry interviewees wondered what would happen to the allowance if things were not going well in a PRA school.

What happens when we have a person on a PRA and it's not going well? It's not clear what happens. (Ministry)

Although a few interviewees involved with a PRA school where the principal was not eligible for the PRA suggested that their eligibility could be reconsidered at the 3-year point, this is not allowable in the policy. It clearly states that "A principal who has been appointed to a principal vacancy but who has been assessed as not meeting the principal eligibility criteria for the allowance cannot subsequently receive the allowance while holding that position".

Laying a foundation for success

Focus question

How do appointed principals establish a change process and plan? What is their initial focus?

Principals are identifying priorities and maintaining attention on multiple areas they want to change

This formative evaluation was firmly not about outcomes. However, many interviewees wanted to share their views on changes within the school. Here are some illustrative comments.

The difference when [new principal] started was almost immediate. (Ministry)

The changes—have you got 6 hours?! (board chair)

He has recognised that [a good relationship with the local iwi] is essential. He's got people on side....That's where he has done exceptionally well. The numbers [in year 9] we have right now, that was a huge tick in the box. That was a big one. (board chair)

It's certainly been a successful appointment and [new principal] has had good support from both within the school and from the community. And that's the most telling because they're the people who will determine [principal's] success to a large extent. The first challenge was to build the roll and that is happening. (statutory appointee)

Research on school change describes it as a journey rather than a formula, recipe, or checklist (Duke, 2004; Wylie & Mitchell, 2003). Leadership takes a different shape "according to the analysis made by each of the new principals of the quality of their staff, and the positioning of the school in its local context" (Wylie & Mitchell, p. 6). This was evident in our discussions with principals when we asked what they had focused on since they had taken up their position. What was clear was that principals were using all available information to prioritise areas of greatest need, whilst also maintaining attention on multiple areas at once. Collectively across the 11 schools we visited, these are the things principals told us they had focused on early in their appointment (in rank order).

- Teachers and teaching, including addressing teacher capability (many had dealt or were dealing with competency procedures) and strengthening pedagogy and curriculum. Cultural

responsiveness was a priority for one principal who described a school with a high proportion of Māori students, but it was “essentially a Pākehā school”. As part of this focus on teachers and teaching, principals were spending time in classrooms themselves.

- Community relationships with whānau and iwi, including a strong focus on roll growth. Some spoke of “repairing bridges” with the community; school identity through uniform had been a focus for others.
- Relationships with and between students, including being very visible and approachable as a principal. In some contexts this involved physical changes such as a different office or removal of curtains from a window. Two principals had made introducing restorative justice a priority; in one of these schools the principal spoke about bringing “positive energy” from the kete aronui into the school, after years of negative energy.
- Property. This was a main priority in one context, but was a part of the mix in many schools, dealing with rundown buildings and working with the Ministry on existing projects.

5. Conclusion

A formative evaluation seeks to understand how a programme is operating, and inform decision making aimed at improvement. This final section of the report revisits the evaluation questions to address whether the PRA is being implemented as planned, what works well, what works less well, and how the design or implementation might be strengthened.

To what degree is the PRA being implemented as planned?

The PRA is largely being implemented as planned. The two-stage eligibility process is well understood and is operating as intended, to identify schools with a principal vacancy and significant challenges, and to attract high quality principals to these schools. Interviewees are positive about the appointments that have been made and the early signs of change in schools.

Funding was available for 20 principals up to June 2016, and an allocation of 20 principals in any one year subsequently. This allocation has not been reached, but only a few interviewees thought there were schools that could meet the criteria but aren't applying. Ministry area office interviewees also considered there were schools that would be likely to meet the criteria if the principal left, creating a vacancy. One-third of boards that could be appointing with the PRA are appointing principals who are not eligible for the allowance.

What is working well?

We highlight the following aspects of the PRA implementation that are working well.

- The role of the senior advisor who brings close knowledge of their portfolio to identify schools for which the PRA would be an appropriate solution.
- The assessment of school applications by the National Assessment Group.
- The role of the NANP in supporting boards with recruitment and providing independent advice on principal eligibility for the PRA.
- Principals' awareness of school context and challenges. It appears that the inclusion of PRA in the advertisement for the position prompts candidates to ensure they understand this.

What is not working so well and where can changes be made to design and implementation to strengthen the PRA?

There are two main areas where the PRA implementation could be strengthened. The first is the level of connection between organisations, most notably the Ministry and ERO. This is strong at the national level (collaboration on the National Assessment Group), but is not being operationalised consistently. Strengthening the purpose and process of the cross-organisational meeting within three months of a principal's appointment would support this.

The second area is the support for principals after appointment, in all schools approved to offer the PRA, whether or not the principal is receiving the allowance. Research on school development recognises that schools do not operate in isolation, and that external support, including funding, plays an important role (Wylie, 2012; Wylie & Mitchell, 2003). The finding that schools need to be able to readily mobilise available support matched to their priority concerns is consistent with the evidence that “the most effective and efficient forms of external support start with accurate identification of individual school needs and timely matching of external expertise and resources with those needs” (Wylie, 2012, p. 13). Strengthening the support for schools after a principal is appointed could also include clarifying ERO's role. The support for boards in PRA schools may also need to be strengthened, with a clearer role for NZSTA.

Other aspects of PRA implementation that could be considered are:

- Improvements to data management, access to data analysts, and provision of exemplars to support area offices with PRA applications.
- The capacity for the NANP to operate in Māori medium settings.
- Mechanisms to support boards to meet annual reporting requirements.
- Clarification of the process for decisions about allowance continuation.

Concluding comments

The importance of effective educational leadership is well-recognised internationally and in New Zealand (Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009; Wylie & Mitchell, 2003; Wylie, 2011). Research on turning struggling schools around particularly highlights the role of leadership (Duke, 2004; The Wallace Foundation, 2011; Wylie & Mitchell, 2003). A US policy guide concludes “there are no documented instances of failing schools turning around without powerful leadership” and that “investing in good principals is a particularly cost-effective way to improve teaching and learning throughout entire schools” (The Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2). It is also recognised that “turnaround principals” possess particular qualities (Duke, 2004). The PRA policy aligns with this evidence base, as a lever to attract and retain highly effective leaders to sustain change in schools with significant challenges. It is a credible response to supporting schools with significant challenges, where they have a principal vacancy.

Overall, the policy is being implemented as intended. The parallel piece of work to this formative evaluation is a framework that will identify the PRA's intended outcomes, and how to monitor and evaluate progress towards these.

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Appendix 1: Areas for investigation and focus questions

Table 3 Evaluation focus: Application and approval (school level)

Area for investigation	Focus questions	Main data sources
Knowledge and use of the PRA, relative to other supports for schools most in need	<p>Is the PRA effectively targeted to schools in greatest need? Are there schools that could be applying and aren't?</p> <p>Are schools proactively applying for the allowance?</p> <p>Is the PRA selected as an appropriate response for school circumstances?</p> <p>To what extent is the role of the PRA, relative to other supports for schools most in need, clearly defined and understood?</p>	<p>Stakeholders</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p>
Expressions of interest	<p>What are the patterns and trends of schools applying for this allowance?</p> <p>Do all schools that express interest go on to make an application? If not, why not?</p> <p>What advice and support is available for boards and area offices at this stage to support a full application?</p>	<p>Documentation</p> <p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p>
School eligibility criteria	<p>How well have the school eligibility criteria worked in practice in helping area offices to identify schools? Are the criteria clear for boards and Ministry area offices?</p>	<p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p>
The application process	<p>Does the application form maximise the likelihood of a successful application if a school meets the criteria (i.e., does it ask for the right information). Do changes need to be made to the application form?</p> <p>How complex and resource intensive is the application process from the board perspective? What do boards say about area office support? What is the relationship between the area office and the school in</p>	<p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p>

Area for investigation	Focus questions	Main data sources
	<p>preparing the application?</p> <p>How complex and resource intensive is the application process from the area office perspective? What do they say about national office support?</p>	
Assessment of applications	<p>What has been the buy-in from the sector for the school eligibility criteria and application processes (including the operation of the National Assessment Group) – how credible are they perceived to be?</p> <p>How well does the assessment process work in practice (including timeliness – see service standards, feedback to applicants)?</p>	Stakeholders Boards
Support for schools when applications are unsuccessful	Do schools whose applications are unsuccessful get appropriate support?	Ministry area offices Stakeholders
Guidelines for area offices, boards (cuts across other areas)	How clear and useful are the guidelines, tools, and supports for Boards and regional Ministry staff for all stages of the application process?	Ministry area offices Boards

Table 4 **Evaluation focus: Principal appointment**

Area for investigation	Questions	Main data sources
Selection processes	<p>How does the role of independent advisor from the New National Appointments Panel work in practice?</p> <p>Do what extent does involvement in the process build board capability in role selection?</p> <p>How does the balance of national (PRA) and local (board) selection criteria play out for schools that appoint with or without the PRA?</p> <p>How clear and useful are the guidelines, tools, and supports for boards?</p>	<p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p> <p>Stakeholders</p>
Principal criteria	<p>Do principal applicants understand the selection and appointment process and eligibility criteria in relation to the PRA?</p> <p>Do eligible schools end up using the allowance? If not, why not?</p> <p>Do they find candidates that meet the eligibility criteria identified?</p>	<p>Principals (We're not talking with unsuccessful candidates, only appointed principals)</p>
Applicants	<p>Are schools most in need more able to attract highly effective principals to existing vacancies than previously?</p> <p>What motivations do principals have to apply? (those eligible for the allowance and those not eligible)</p>	<p>Documentation</p> <p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p> <p>Stakeholders</p>
Briefing to principal about school context and issues (discussed after "after appointment" in the report")	<p>What is the quality of information that principals receive about school context and issues prior to and after appointment?</p> <p>How well prepared did the principals feel for their challenge – Is there information that principals needed in order to understand the school context and issues that they did not get?</p>	<p>PRA principals</p> <p>Principals appointed without the allowance</p>

Table 5 **Evaluation focus: After appointment**

Area for investigation	Questions	Main data sources
Support	<p>What is the nature and extent of support from the local Ministry office once the principal is appointed? (includes principals appointed without the PRA)</p> <p>What is the nature and extent of support from other agencies and organisations once the principal is appointed (ERO, NZSTA, Te Runanga Nui, Area Schools Association) (includes principals appointed without the PRA)</p> <p>How does the cross-organisational meeting within three months of appointment work in practice?</p> <p>Do principals think they have the support they need to change the school sustainably?</p>	<p>Principals</p> <p>Boards</p> <p>Stakeholders</p>
Accountability	<p>Do boards understand their obligations? How do these work in practice?</p> <p>Do principals understand the expectations and obligations for receiving the PRA? How do these work in practice?</p>	<p>Boards</p> <p>Principals</p>
Criteria and processes for allowance continuation	<p>To what extent are the criteria and processes for allowance continuation understood?</p>	<p>Boards</p> <p>Principals</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p> <p>Stakeholders</p>

Table 6 **Planning for a future outcomes evaluation**

Area for investigation	Questions	Main data sources
Laying a foundation for success	<p>How do appointed principals establish a change process and plan? What is their initial focus?</p> <p>How do they integrate this process into schools' strategic planning and documents?</p> <p>Are there sufficient, appropriate resources and support in place for the Board and principal to implement a change plan?</p> <p>How well is the change plan working? What is realistic to achieve in what time frame?</p>	<p>Principals</p> <p>Boards</p>
Outcomes – short, medium, long-term	<p>How will the sector know the PRA is working as intended?</p> <p>What will success look like in the short, medium and long-term?</p> <p>What time-frames are realistic to see progress?</p> <p>What is the PRA's expected contribution to achieving desired outcomes for schools with significant challenges?</p>	<p>Stakeholders</p> <p>Principals</p> <p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p>
Current monitoring system	<p>What information and data is currently collected? How could this contribute to understanding progress towards outcomes?</p> <p>What are viable outcome measures?</p>	<p>Stakeholders</p> <p>Principals</p> <p>Boards</p> <p>Ministry area offices</p>