

# National Standards in their seventh year

Linda Bonne

Findings from the NZCER National Survey of Primary and Intermediate Schools 2016



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# Key findings

The National Standards measures of student performance have now been in place since 2010. The 2016 NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools finds that, while they are part and parcel of teaching and school decision making, questions continue around their impact for students, differences in their interpretation and their impact on the rest of the curriculum. Over half of teachers and principals still feel they have not had the support they need to work with National Standards.

- National Standards are seen to shape what schools do by many teachers and some principals. Over two-thirds of teachers reported a narrowing of the curriculum they teach, associated with National Standards; 32% of principals reported that National Standards drives what the school does; and 40% indicated the focus on literacy and mathematics has taken their attention away from other aspects of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC), which schools started to work with in draft form in 2007.
- But at the same time, more principals said that NZC is driving what they do in their school (54%, up from 38% in 2013), and 43% said that they continue to build approaches and practices that align with NZC.
- Many teachers indicated that their school has a shared understanding of National Standards that means that overall teacher judgements (OTJs) at the school are consistent, and that their moderation work with other teachers has provided insights for their practice. Just over one-third of principals reported their school was working with other schools to moderate National Standards judgements.
- Further external guidance and support for working with National Standards still seemed to be needed. Only 41% of the principals and 49% of teachers thought they had had enough support and guidance to feel confident about their work with National Standards.
- Many principals and teachers had doubts that the National Standards data provide a reliable picture of student performance, whether for their school or for local schools. Respondents' comments echoed a perception that National Standards represent a narrow slice of what students know and can do, rather than their overall performance.
- National Standards data are used by most principals in school decision making, including identification of students' learning needs and progress over time, identifying professional learning priorities and resource allocation. Less than half of trustees thought National Standards data were useful for making decisions about resource allocation.
- There is a greater focus on students who are 'below' or 'well below' National Standards. More teachers than in 2013 were focusing on students who are achieving 'below' or 'well below' Standards (63% in 2016, up from 47%). While this may seem a positive change in itself, there was also some evidence of less attention for students who already exceed the Standard for their age or year level.

- There was uncertainty about improvements in student achievement associated with National Standards. In 2010, 84% of teachers and 85% of principals predicted National Standards would not change achievement much because they were already identifying student need and working hard to increase rates of learning progress. In 2016, only 16% of teachers agreed the impact of National Standards on students' achievement overall has been positive.
- Teachers' concern about the effect of some students' anxiety about their National Standards performance has increased since 2013, and was higher for teachers of older students. Teachers also voiced concern about students not having enough time to consolidate learning before being moved on.
- Concern was evident about the negative effects on those students whose performance is labelled as 'below' or 'well below' a Standard and whose progress is not visible in terms of current reporting practices. To a lesser degree, there was also concern about students who perform well above a Standard not having their high achievement acknowledged, using the existing terminology of simply being 'above' a Standard.
- National Standards seemed to have little to offer students with additional learning needs. Concern about the negative effects of labelling these students' performance—often as 'below' or 'well below' National Standards over the long term—was particularly clear. Few agreed that National Standards help with the inclusion of students with additional learning needs. Some principals and trustees were concerned that including National Standards data for students with additional learning needs in their overall school data lowered their results, leading people to think the school was not performing as well as it was.
- Most parents and whānau reported receiving clear information in their child's mid-year report about their achievement of National Standards for reading, writing and mathematics. Principals indicated greater use being made of illustrations of the National Standards in reporting to parents and whānau than in 2013. Fifty-one percent of parents thought National Standards provide a valuable record of their child's learning.

# 1.

## Introduction

National Standards had been part of New Zealand’s education landscape for almost 7 years when the NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools 2016 was conducted. Previous survey rounds in 2013 and 2010 enable us to track changes since reporting students’ achievement in terms of National Standards first became mandatory in 2010.

Schools’ work with *The New Zealand Curriculum*<sup>1</sup> (NZC) has also been an ongoing area of interest for our national surveys. Published in its final form in 2007, NZC described broad areas for teaching and learning and gave schools the flexibility and authority to design a school curriculum appropriate to their local context. This enabled schools to interpret the curriculum in response to their students’ particular needs and interests. Assessment of learning was positioned as an integral component of an ongoing process of teaching as inquiry, with teachers choosing assessment types to suit their purposes across the eight learning areas of NZC.

In 2010, while schools were continuing to develop and embed their interpretation of the curriculum, the National Standards for Years 1 to 8—focusing specifically on reading, writing and mathematics—were introduced. National Standards were an important component of a strategy to raise student achievement levels and were also aimed at reporting student achievement information to parents and whānau in plain language. National Standards were developed and introduced hurriedly with little input from teachers. In a system of self-managing schools, the perceptions that National Standards were being imposed by government and that they were not well tested contributed to their introduction being met with resistance from many teachers and principals and their representative bodies, the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI) and the New Zealand Principals’ Federation (NZPF). These feelings still lingered when Thrupp (2013)<sup>2</sup> noted increasing compliance by schools but also cautioned “this does not mean it has captured ‘hearts and minds’ amongst principals, teachers and boards” (p. 10). The opportunity was missed for the National Standards to be a point of convergence for the work schools had been doing with NZC and assessment—aimed at improving teaching and learning—and a growing expectation among schools that they would work in clusters for professional learning.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Ministry of Education. (2007). *The New Zealand curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.

2 Thrupp, M. (2013). *Research, analysis and insight into National Standards (RAINS) project, second report: Understanding New Zealand’s very local national standards*. Hamilton: Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research, University of Waikato.

3 See Wylie, C. (2012). *Vital connections: Why we need more than self-managing schools*. Wellington: NZCER, (pp. 201–207).

Measuring attainment of National Standards relies on overall teacher judgements (OTJs) about students' achievement in relation to National Standards. The term 'overall teacher judgements' itself suggests that OTJs are not a precise measure of a student's achievement of the various aspects of reading, writing and mathematics included in National Standards. Consistency of teachers' understanding of what it means to be 'at' a particular Standard, for instance, is important at different levels for these reasons:

- Consistency of OTJs between teachers at the same school is important for communicating about teaching and learning—among teachers and leaders, with students themselves and with parents and whānau.
- Consistency of OTJs between teachers at different schools is important when schools are working collaboratively to improve teaching and learning and when students and teachers move from one school to another.
- Consistency is also important in order for interpretation of National Standards data for all schools to enable national achievement patterns to be identified and monitored.

However, consistency of OTJs has proven problematic, as Hattie (2009)<sup>4</sup> predicted it would. Nor did this come as a surprise to Vince Wright, who led the writing of the National Standards for mathematics. Reflecting on his work with an expert panel to create these National Standards, he commented: "Critics correctly claimed that if small groups of experts are unable to interpret the standards consistently, what hope is there for consistency between teachers in their OTJs, let alone between schools"<sup>5</sup> (Wright, 2015, p. 599). With National Standards introduced quickly and with little support, it should have come as no surprise that the variability of OTJs was identified as an issue soon after their introduction.<sup>6</sup> Teachers and principals had identified early on that they would need support to make sound OTJs, and suggested government support for clusters of schools to moderate their work together.

In a major 5-year study, the *National Standards School Sample Monitoring and Evaluation Project*,<sup>7</sup> Ward and Thomas collected a variety of data from up to 100 schools that were approximately representative of all New Zealand schools from 2010 to 2014—the first 5 years of National Standards. These data included teachers' end-of-year OTJs; schools' achievement targets; online surveys of principals, teachers and board chairs; and copies of reports to parents and whānau. Also informing their analysis were teacher judgements made during the national trial of the mathematics Progress and Consistency Tool (PaCT) in 2013. Ward and Thomas identified variability in OTJs, particularly in OTJs made for Years 7–8 students at full primary schools tending to be more positive than OTJs for students at intermediate schools. They also found that 40% of mathematics OTJs made in schools were consistent with judgements made in the trial of PaCT. Ward and Thomas concluded that the OTJ data "lack dependability, which is problematic as OTJs are a central element of the National Standards system" (p. 2). They cautioned that what might appear to be increases in student achievement over time (e.g., in 2010, 64% of students were judged to be 'at' or 'above' the National Standards for writing, compared with 70% in 2014) might also reflect changes in the judgements teachers have been making. Alternatively, the data might reflect an increased focus in teaching of—in this example—writing.

Lawes explored the consistency of teacher judgements by comparing the 2013 national OTJs data relating to National Standards in mathematics<sup>8</sup> to patterns of student achievement data from PAT: Mathematics,<sup>9</sup>

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4 Hattie, J.A.C. (2009, October). *Horizons and whirlpools: The well travelled pathway of national standards*. Working paper from Visible Learning Lab, University of Auckland. Retrieved 25 October 2016, from [http://growthmindseteaz.org/files/Nat\\_20\\_20Standards\\_20Horizons\\_20and\\_20Whirlpools\\_20-J\\_20Hattie\\_202009.pdf](http://growthmindseteaz.org/files/Nat_20_20Standards_20Horizons_20and_20Whirlpools_20-J_20Hattie_202009.pdf)

5 Wright, V. (2015). Globalisation and the New Zealand numeracy standards: In pursuit of excellence. In J. Zajda (Ed.), *Second international handbook on globalisation, education and policy research* (pp. 589–603). doi:10.1007/978-94-017-9493-0\_34

6 Thrupp, M., & Easter, A. (2012). *Researching schools' enactments of New Zealand's National Standards policy. First report of the Research, Analysis and Insight into National Standards (RAINS) project*. Hamilton: The University of Waikato.

7 Ward, J., & Thomas, G. (2016). *National Standards: School sample monitoring and evaluation project, 2010–2014*. Report to the Ministry of Education. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

8 Lawes, E. (unpublished). *Exploring the consistency of teacher judgements against the National Standards in Mathematics*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

9 Darr, C., Neill, A., Stephanou, A., & Ferral, H. (2009). *Progressive achievement test: Mathematics: Teacher manual* (2nd ed., revised). Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

a psychometrically robust assessment that was designed to assess key mathematics concepts in NZC. Lawes identified that teachers at different year levels apply the National Standards in mathematics differently. Additionally, he found that performance expectations were interpreted in different ways by teachers compared with curriculum experts who had been involved in setting the standards for the PaCT for mathematics.

Because of the varying interpretations of National Standards and their related OTJs, we cannot be sure that National Standards are playing their intended role in raising student achievement, or whether Hattie's prediction "that [National Standards] will barely if at all change the mean achievement scores of the nation" (2009, p. 5) is closer to the mark. According to Ministry of Education figures, for instance, the rates of students 'at' or 'above' the National Standard increased less than 1 percent from 2013 to 2015, in each of reading, writing and mathematics.<sup>10</sup> Alongside the data from the schools in the study by Ward and Thomas, the overall picture of improvements in achievement appeared to settle down somewhat after the first few years of implementation. Again, it is unclear how much of these changes are associated with teachers' OTJs becoming more consistent over time and how much might be attributable to the increased effectiveness of teaching in reading, writing and mathematics.

Also unclear is the extent to which National Standards may have supported increased equity for students. Differences associated with school decile persist. In Ward and Thomas's (2016) analysis of OTJ data for 2010 to 2014, the biggest increases in students judged 'at' or 'above' National Standards were apparent for students at decile 1–3 schools. However, the proportions of students at these schools who were achieving National Standards continued to be smaller than those for students at decile 4–10 schools.

Looking at the National Standards results by students' ethnicity for the period 2013 to 2015,<sup>11</sup> the biggest improvements in students 'at' or 'above' National Standards were for Pasifika students, ranging from just under 2% increase for reading to 3% for writing. However, there is still some way to go to narrow the gap between, for example, the proportion of Pasifika students at or above the National Standards for writing in 2015 (almost 61%) compared with European/Pākehā students (77%).

Also related to equity is the positioning of students with additional learning needs in relation to National Standards. Many of these students are likely to remain working within one level of the curriculum for some time. How helpful is it to these students—and their parents and whānau—to be repeatedly reporting they do not meet National Standards? The question also arises of whether schools include their data for students with additional learning needs in their school reporting, or whether these students' results are excluded to inflate the overall picture. Hattie (2009) pointed out that the latter happened with standards in the United States, and raised the possibility that teachers might be less inclined to spend time teaching students whose results are excluded. Might a focus on increasing the proportion of students who at least attain National Standards result in a teacher investing more time with students who have not yet attained the appropriate Standard, at the expense of students who are already achieving beyond it and of students who are likely to spend an extended period, progressing at a slower rate than most students?

There is a potential tension between the expansive local curriculum possibilities of NZC and the more prescriptive nature of National Standards. Are some schools achieving a blend of the National Standards and their ongoing work with a more holistic enactment of NZC?

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<sup>10</sup> See [http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/schooling/national-standards/National\\_Standards](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/schooling/national-standards/National_Standards)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

## 2.

# National Standards in NZCER national surveys 2010 and 2013

Questions relating to National Standards were first included in the 2010 NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools, to identify perceptions of the initial impact of National Standards becoming mandatory, and expectations of their future impact for the goal of improved student achievement. Eighty-five percent of principals and a similar proportion of teachers predicted National Standards would not change achievement much because they were already identifying student need and working hard to increase rates of learning progress. Around two-thirds of both groups thought that what was really needed to change rates of learning progress was additional support.

At the next survey in 2013,<sup>12</sup> schools had been working with National Standards for a few years, and many of the questions asked in the survey focused on the changes that were associated with the effects of the National Standards becoming part of usual practice. Eighty-two percent of principals and 78% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed there was no big difference to student achievement because they had previously identified individual student need and worked hard to increase rates of learning progress. Two-thirds of principals and half the teachers reported National Standards had narrowed the curriculum in their school. In addition, around one-third of principals reported the focus on literacy and mathematics had taken their attention away from other aspects of NZC.

Based on issues identified in responses to the 2013 survey, Wylie and Berg (2013)<sup>13</sup> recommended a number of changes for making further progress toward the goal for 85% of students to be performing 'at'

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<sup>12</sup> Wylie, C., & Bonne, L. (2014). *Primary and intermediate schools in 2013: Main findings from the NZCER national survey*. Wellington: NZCER.

<sup>13</sup> Wylie, C., & Berg, M. (2013). *National Standards: What difference are they making?* Paper presented at NZARE conference, 26–28 December, Dunedin. Available at <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/national-survey>

or 'above' National Standards. The discouraging effect of labelling a student's performance as 'below' or 'well below' a National Standard was one such issue; changes to a more strengths-based terminology were suggested. Inter-school moderation was recommended to increase confidence in the validity of OTJs and to strengthen teachers' assessment knowledge. They also identified the likely benefits of taking a close look at schools where student achievement had clearly increased, as well as schools where their ongoing work with NZC was successfully incorporating National Standards, to learn more about how this can be done. Wylie and Berg's final recommendation was to:

Initiate the learning approach to the use of the National Standards recommended by the Ministry of Education's National Standards Aggregate Results Group with a set of connected projects that are based on joint work between the Ministry, the teaching profession, and those who support teaching through assessment design, professional development, and research. (p. 20)

### 3.

# National Standards in 2016—the picture from the NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools

In this report,<sup>14</sup> I look at how the implementation of the National Standards is playing out in schools, and how this has changed since 2013. Related to this, teachers' responses about their use of various types of assessment are described. Then I look at how the implementation of National Standards and NZC interact in school settings. Principals' and teachers' responses will be drawn on to answer questions such as: How does a mandatory assessment focus seem to interact with a potentially expansive curriculum? To what extent are teachers using the assessment information they draw on to inform overall teacher judgements to also inform their inquiry into effective practice?

## The 2016 NZCER national survey

The survey was conducted from August to early September 2016 and was sent to a representative sample of 349 English-medium state and state-integrated primary and intermediate schools (20% of all these schools in New Zealand).<sup>15</sup> At these schools, surveys were sent to the principal and to a random sample of one in two teachers. Surveys also went to the board of trustees' chair, who was asked to give a second

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<sup>14</sup> The national survey is comprehensive. Further reports on other topics, such as Communities of Learning, and students' wellbeing will be added to the project web page: <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/national-survey>

<sup>15</sup> Further details about the sample, etc., will be available at the project web page: <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/national-survey>

trustee survey to someone likely to have a different viewpoint from their own. Additionally, surveys were sent to a random sample of one in four parents at a cross-section of 36 schools. The response rates were 57% for principals ( $n = 200$ ), 38% for teachers ( $n = 771$ ), 25% for trustees ( $n = 176$ ), and 32% for parents and whānau ( $n = 504$ ).

The survey returns for principals, teachers and trustees were generally representative of schools in the sample, with the following small variations:

- Principal returns showed a slight over-representation of large schools, and urban schools. Decile 8–10 schools were somewhat over-represented, as were schools in the Auckland region.
- In the schools from which teachers returned surveys, there was a slight under-representation of large schools, and an over-representation of small–medium and small schools. Slight under-representations were evident of decile 1 schools and schools in the Auckland and Hawke’s Bay/ Gisborne Ministry of Education regions.
- The schools from which we received trustee surveys reflected some over-representation of large schools and under-representation of decile 1 schools.

The maximum margin of error<sup>16</sup> for the principal survey is 6.9%, for the teacher survey around 3.5% and for the trustee survey around 7.4%. Sometimes we report results for smaller groups of respondents within each survey; the maximum margin of error reported for each survey does not apply to these groups. Calculating the margin of error relies on random sampling and because we rely on schools to select the teachers and trustees to complete surveys, we cannot guarantee that these samples are random. Therefore, the margins of error for the teacher and trustee surveys should be regarded as approximations. The parent and whānau sample is not a random sample, therefore we do not calculate a margin of error for that survey.

I begin by looking at the information teachers were using to make OTJs, how these data are used by principals and how they are reported. The views of each of the respondent groups are then presented separately,<sup>17</sup> with links made where appropriate.

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<sup>16</sup> The maximum margin of error added to and subtracted from a proportion gives a confidence interval. We can say there is a 95% chance that the proportion is inside this range of numbers.

<sup>17</sup> Because different sampling methods are used to select the four respondent groups, we do not compare response rates from one group with those of other groups.

## 4.

# Teachers and their overall teacher judgements

As part of a bigger question about assessment, teachers indicated which of a given list of assessment types they use to inform their OTJs in relation to National Standards (see Table 1).<sup>18</sup> Teacher observations and classroom work were used for this purpose by the greatest proportions of teachers, with more formal assessments—those that involved a record of a student’s performance on set tasks—being used by more than three-quarters of teachers for their OTJs. Much less use was being made of students’ views about their own learning and that of their peers.

Compared with 2013, the use of self-assessment had decreased (24%, down from 43% in 2013), as had peer assessment (19%, down from 34%). A smaller proportion of teachers reported using standardised assessments (77%, compared with 87% in 2013). This was not related to a smaller proportion of teachers of senior students (who may have been thought more likely to use standardised assessments) returning surveys. In fact, there was some increase in the proportion of teachers of Year 8 students (23% of all teachers in 2016, compared with 16% in 2013).

Also important to include here is that the same assessments that teachers were using to inform OTJs were being used by at least as many teachers to identify individuals’ next learning steps. These are all assessment types that teachers had been using, for a range of purposes, prior to the introduction of National Standards. Whether bringing together various evidence to make OTJs was giving teachers better and new information for students’ next learning steps would need further investigation.

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<sup>18</sup> Details about additional purposes for which teachers were using these assessments will be described in a separate NZCER national survey report about teachers’ perspectives, pedagogy and curriculum in early 2017.

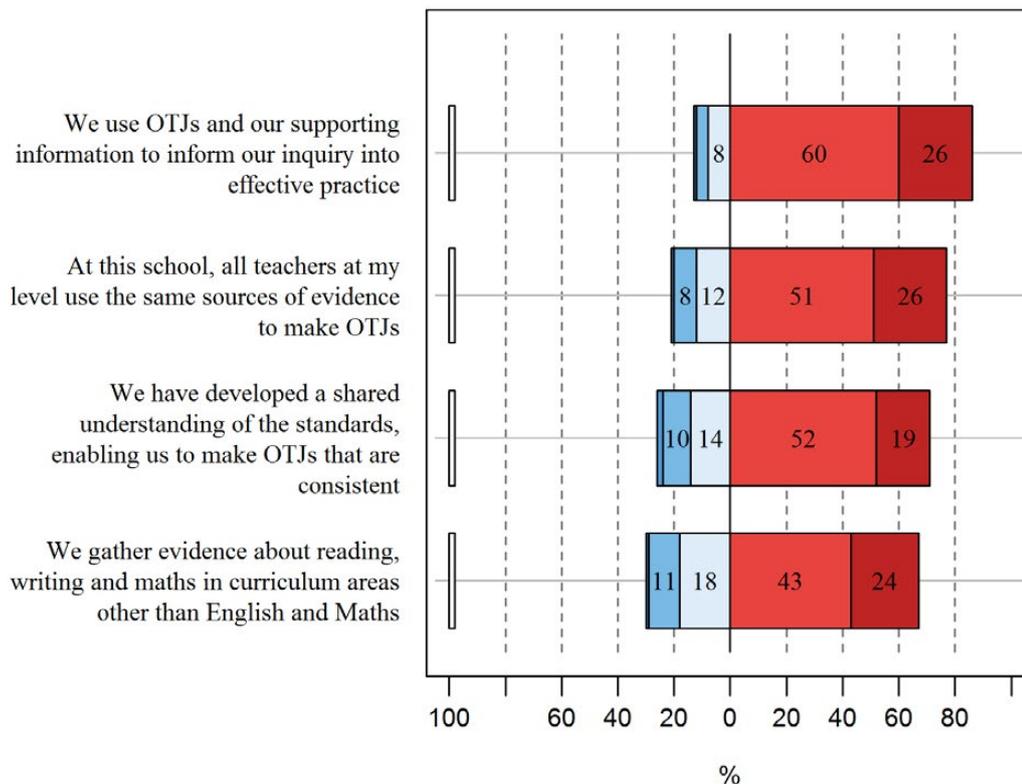
TABLE 1 Types of assessments teachers reported using to inform OTJs

| Assessment types  | Informs OTJs<br>% |
|---|-------------------|
| My observations   | 91                |
| Classroom work  | 88                |
| A (non-standardised) reading assessment (e.g., PM Benchmarks, PROBE, instructional text levels) | 83                |
| A (non-standardised) numeracy assessment (e.g., GLOSS, IKAN, NUMPA)                             | 80                |
| A standardised assessment (e.g., PAT, e-asTTle, STAR, Observation Survey)                       | 77                |
| A (non-standardised) writing assessment (e.g., writing samples benchmarked against exemplars)   | 77                |
| Self-assessment   | 24                |
| Peer assessment   | 19                |

Nine percent ( $n = 67$ ) of the teachers who responded to the survey had used PaCT to support their OTJs in 2016. PaCT is a Ministry-funded online tool that was developed to support teachers to make consistent judgements of students' performance in relation to the National Standards. It illustrates curriculum content related to reading, writing and mathematics and statistics, using learning progression frameworks to signal significant steps for learners. When teachers use PaCT they compare a student's achievement against sets of illustrations of achievement across various aspects of a learning area. PaCT combines these judgements to locate the student's overall achievement on a measurement scale and recommend a best-fit National Standard. PaCT was made available to all schools at the start of 2015.

Figure 1 shows the majority (86%) of teachers reported using OTJs and their supporting information to inform their inquiry into effective practice. Slightly fewer indicated that at their school, all teachers at their level use the same sources of information to make OTJs. Importantly, 71% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed they have developed a shared understanding of National Standards at their school, enabling them to make consistent OTJs. Sixty-seven percent of teachers reported collecting evidence about students' reading, writing and mathematics in other learning areas.

FIGURE 1 Making and using OTJs, reported by teachers



No response
  Strongly disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral/Not sure
  Agree
  Strongly agree

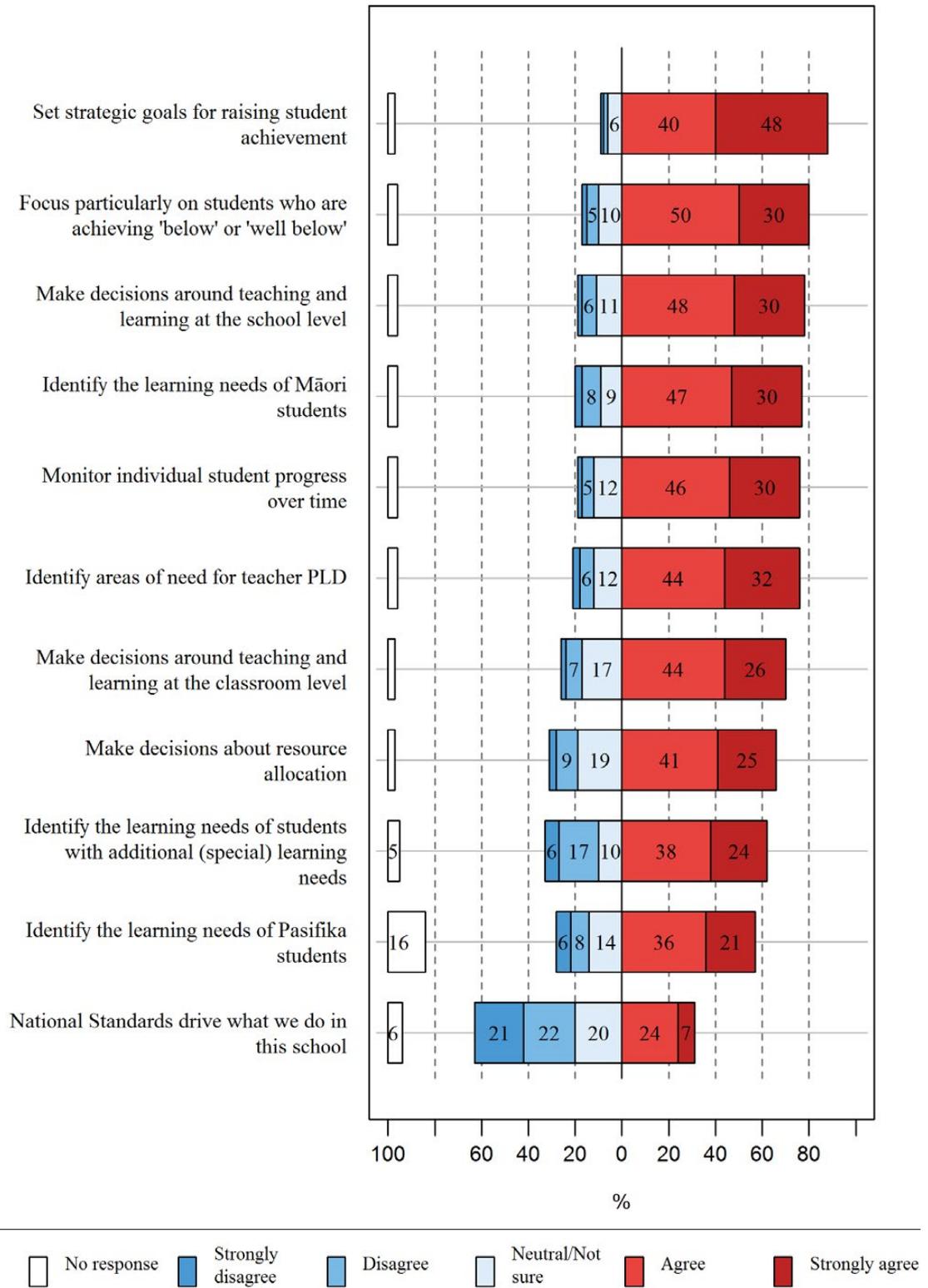
### How principals use National Standards data

Many principals reported using National Standards data to set strategic goals for student achievement, and to make decisions related to school-wide student achievement, or the learning of groups of students or individuals (see Figure 2). At least two-thirds used the data for making decisions about teacher professional learning and development (PLD) and resource allocation.

Eighty percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed National Standards data are used to focus particularly on students who are achieving ‘below’ or ‘well below’ a Standard.

Although National Standards data were used by many principals for a variety of purposes in their school, only 31% of principals agreed or strongly agreed National Standards drive what they do in their school.

FIGURE 2 How principals reported National Standards data are being used



Only one of these items was also included in the 2013 survey. There was a noticeable increase in the proportion of principals who strongly agreed they use the data at their school to *Focus particularly on students who are achieving 'below' or 'well below'* (30% in 2016, up from 11% in 2013).

In 2013, we asked principals about whether they thought using National Standards was providing them with better data than before to identify the learning needs of priority learning groups and 21% of principals agreed. In 2016, we asked more specifically about whether principals were using National Standards data to identify the learning needs of Māori students, Pasifika students and students with additional (special) learning needs. Seventy-seven percent reported using the data to identify Māori students' learning needs, 57% for Pasifika students' needs, and 62% for students with additional learning needs.

Fifty-one percent of the principals indicated they share individual students' National Standards performance if they move to another school.

## Reporting to parents and whānau

The way schools were reporting National Standards to parents and whānau had changed somewhat since 2013. A slightly smaller proportion of principals reported using the four levels ('above', 'at', 'below' and 'well below') for all students in written reports (66%, down from 74% in 2013).<sup>19</sup> This was accompanied by increases in other ways of reporting. A greater proportion of principals indicated they use these levels in oral reporting to parents and whānau (34%, up from 16% in 2013). Fifty-six percent of principals reported using the term 'working towards' for all students who are not clearly 'at' or 'above' the Standard, compared with 48% in 2013.<sup>20</sup> Also increased was the proportion of principals who reported using illustrations so parents have a picture of their child's achievement level (41%, up from 25% in 2013). This seems likely to increase in the future with the Ministry of Education making the online Learning Progression Frameworks<sup>21</sup> available to all schools around the same time this survey was conducted, providing illustrations of likely steps in students' reading, writing and mathematics learning.

When asked to choose which things they received clear information about in mid-year reporting (not long before the survey was conducted in August), the majority of parents and whānau indicated getting clear information about their child's performance in relation to National Standards (see Table 2).

TABLE 2 Parents and whānau who reported receiving clear information about their child in mid-year reporting

|   | 2016<br>(n = 504)<br>% |
|---|------------------------|
| Where they are in relation to the National Standards in reading     | 87                     |
| Where they are in relation to the National Standards in writing     | 86                     |
| Where they are in relation to the National Standards in mathematics | 85                     |
| (n = 504)   |                        |

Teachers were asked a wider question about whether they agreed with the statement: *Most of our parents and whānau understand the National Standards*. Thirteen percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed this was the case, whereas 63% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 22% responded neutral/not sure.

19 For guidance on alternative ways of reporting, see <http://assessment.tki.org.nz/Reporting-to-parents-whanau/Examples-and-templates>

20 The item was *We use the four levels ('above', 'at', 'below', 'well below') for all students in written reports*, and did not specify end-of-year or mid-year reporting.

21 The Learning Progression Frameworks for reading, writing and mathematics span curriculum levels 1–5 and illustrate likely learning progressions. See <http://www.education.govt.nz/news/new-resources-for-teachers-to-help-teaching-and-learning/>

## 5.

# What did respondents think about National Standards in 2016?

In this section we present the views of principals, teachers, trustees, and parents and whānau, relating to National Standards. Each section begins with responses to items that were common to other respondent groups (e.g., their support for National Standards, perceptions of reliability of National Standards data in relation to student performance), then moves to items that were specific to each group.

### Principals' views

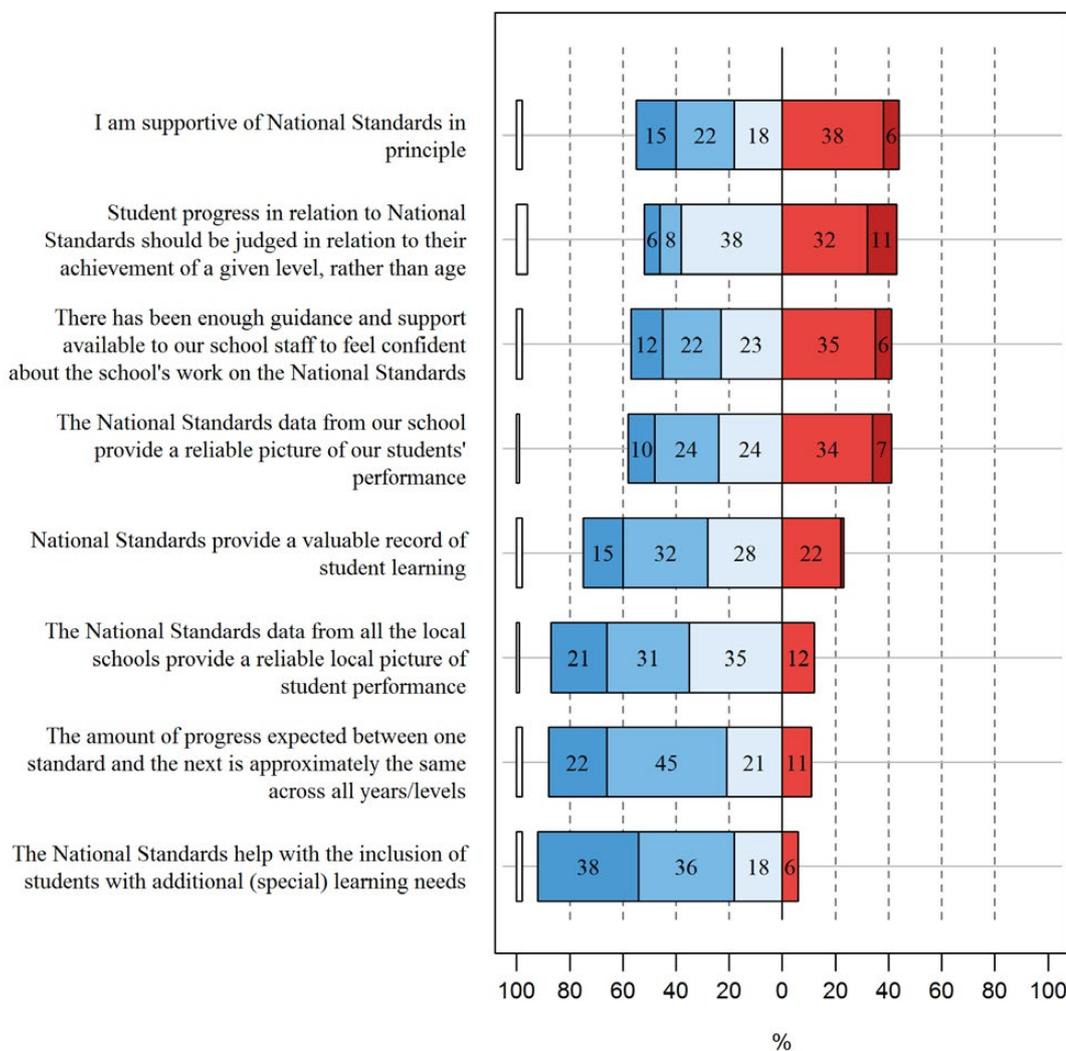
Although less than half the principals agreed or strongly agreed they are supportive of National Standards in principle (see Figure 3), this has increased somewhat since 2013 (from 38% to 44% in 2016). But although principals are somewhat more supportive of National Standards, there was a substantial drop in the proportion who thought National Standards provide a valuable picture of student learning (23% in 2016 compared with 37% in 2013).

Forty-three percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed that student progress relative to National Standards should be judged in relation to their achievement of a given level, rather than age. Only slightly fewer (38%) responded neutral/not sure. The idea that the focus should be on identifying and reporting a student's individual progress, rather than their achievement—or not—of a set of standards was a main theme in principals' and teachers' comments on National Standards, covered later in the report.

Forty-one percent of principals indicated the National Standards data from their own school provide a reliable picture of their students' performance, and a smaller proportion (12%) thought National Standards data from all the local schools provide a reliable local picture of student performance. It is not known whether responses to these two items may have been interpreted by some respondents to

mean National Standards give a reliable picture of students' performance *overall*, rather than in literacy and mathematics *specifically*, or whether the response rates actually reflect principals' views about the reliability of the National Standards data.

FIGURE 3 Principals' views about National Standards



No response  
  Strongly disagree  
  Disagree  
  Neutral/Not sure  
  Agree  
  Strongly agree

Most of the 41% of principals ( $n = 82$ ) who agreed or strongly agreed the National Standards data from their school provide a reliable picture of their students' performance, also agreed or strongly agreed they use these data to:

- set strategic goals for raising student achievement (95%)
- make decisions around teaching and learning at the school level (90%)
- identify areas of need for teacher PLD (89%).

## 5. What did respondents think about National Standards in 2016?

These proportions are greater than those for all principals, shown earlier in Figure 2. It is not surprising that principals who think their school's data are reliable tend to use them more for these direction-setting purposes. However, just over half of this group of principals (52%) also agreed or strongly agreed there had been enough guidance and support available to their school staff to feel confident about the school's work on the National Standards.

The proportion of all principals agreeing there had been enough guidance and support available for their school staff to feel confident about the school's work with National Standards had increased to 41%, up from 23% in 2013 and 11% in 2010. This leaves more than half the principals either disagreeing or giving a neutral/not sure response, suggesting this continues to be an area of need.

Just over two-thirds of principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that the amount of progress expected between one Standard and the next is approximately the same across all year levels. Work by Lawes and Darr<sup>22</sup> suggests the amount of progress required between National Standards does vary.

Almost three-quarters (74%) of principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that National Standards help with the inclusion of students with additional learning needs. This was down from 86% who held this view in 2013.

School decile was associated with principals' responses to very few items about National Standards. However, there was a relationship between the two items about the National Standards data providing reliable pictures of student performance and school decile (see Table 3). Confidence that the National Standards were a good indication was strongest in decile 9–10 schools (where National Standards achievement levels are highest).

**TABLE 3 National Standards data provide reliable pictures of student performance; principals' agree and strongly agree responses by school decile**

|   | Decile 1-2<br>(n = 36)<br>% | Decile 3-4<br>(n = 35)<br>% | Decile 5-6<br>(n = 35)<br>% | Decile 7-8<br>(n = 43)<br>% | Decile 9-10<br>(n = 51)<br>% |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| The National Standards data from <i>our school</i> provide a reliable picture of our students' performance                  | 22                          | 31                          | 46                          | 33                          | 65                           |
| The National Standards data from <i>all the local schools</i> provide a reliable local picture of our students' performance | 0                           | 6                           | 17                          | 5                           | 28                           |

Moderation of National Standards OTJs with other schools was reported by 35% of principals, and did not vary by school decile.

In all principals' responses to items about National Standards, there were no associations between school location or size.

22 Lawes and Darr reported the results of standard-setting exercises used to link the PaCT scales in reading, writing and mathematics with the performance demands of the respective National Standards. For each scale, the differences between the National Standards cut scores from one year to the next did not represent the same amount of progress. Lawes, E., & Darr, C. (unpublished). *The Progress and Consistency Tool: Reading framework technical report*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research; Lawes, E., & Darr, C. (unpublished). *The Progress and Consistency Tool: Writing framework technical report*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research; Lawes, E., & Darr, C. (unpublished). *The Progress and Consistency Tool: Mathematics framework technical report*. Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

## Teachers' views

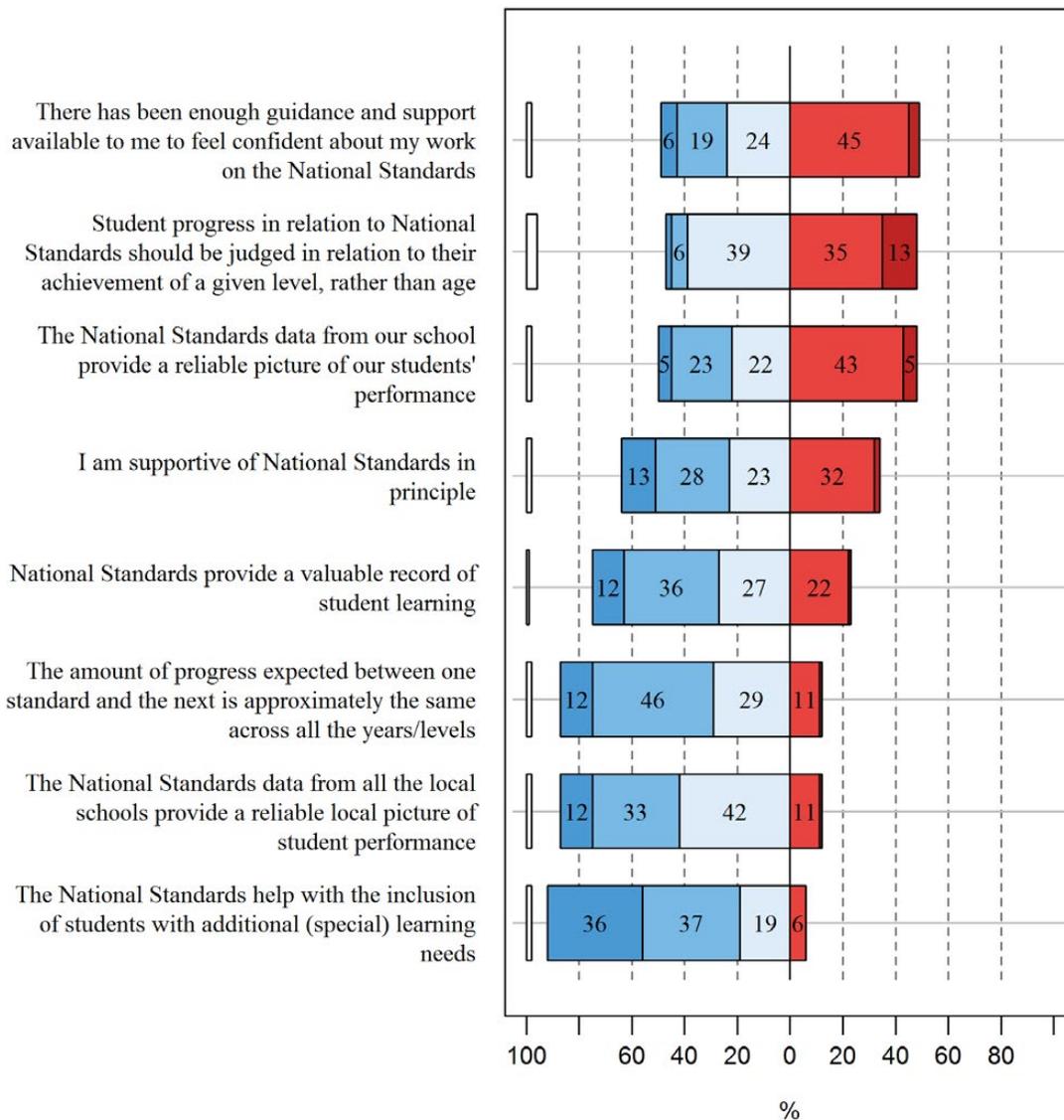
Teachers' support for National Standards remained around the same as 2013, when it was 35%. The proportion who agreed National Standards provide a valuable record of student learning was stable at 23% (see Figure 4).

Forty-nine percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed there had been enough guidance and support available to them to feel confident about their work with National Standards. This was up from 38% in 2013 and 16% in 2010. However, teachers in rural schools were less likely to agree they had received enough guidance and support (38%).

Almost half (48%) thought student progress should be judged in relation to their achievement of a given level, rather than age. A further 39% of teachers responded neutral/not sure.

The same proportion (48%) of teachers agreed or strongly agreed the National Standards data from their school provide a reliable picture of student performance. Given that, as we saw earlier, 71% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed they have developed a shared understanding of National Standards that enables teachers at their school to make consistent OTJs, it seems possible the term 'student performance' may have been interpreted in a range of ways. As we will see later in teachers' comments, some were concerned National Standards did not reflect students' achievement beyond reading, writing and mathematics. 'Student performance', to these teachers, might signify something bigger than National Standards performance.

FIGURE 4 Teachers' views of National Standards



No response   
  Strongly disagree   
  Disagree   
  Neutral/Not sure   
  Agree   
  Strongly agree

Of those teachers who agreed or strongly agreed data from their school provide a reliable picture of their students' performance ( $n = 367$ ):

- 81% also agreed or strongly agreed they have developed a shared understanding of National Standards, enabling them to make OTJs that are consistent
- 63% also agreed or strongly agreed there had been sufficient guidance and support (with 16% of these teachers responding neutral/not sure and 21%, disagree or strongly disagree).

Eleven percent of all the teachers thought the data from all their local schools provide a reliable local picture of student performance. Even allowing for different interpretations of these two items about data reliability, this suggests there is a need for further guidance and support, and collaboration to moderate OTJs, both within and between schools.

Seventy-three percent of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that National Standards help with the inclusion of students with additional learning needs, and a further 19% responded neutral/not sure.

### **Effects of National Standards on teachers and teaching**

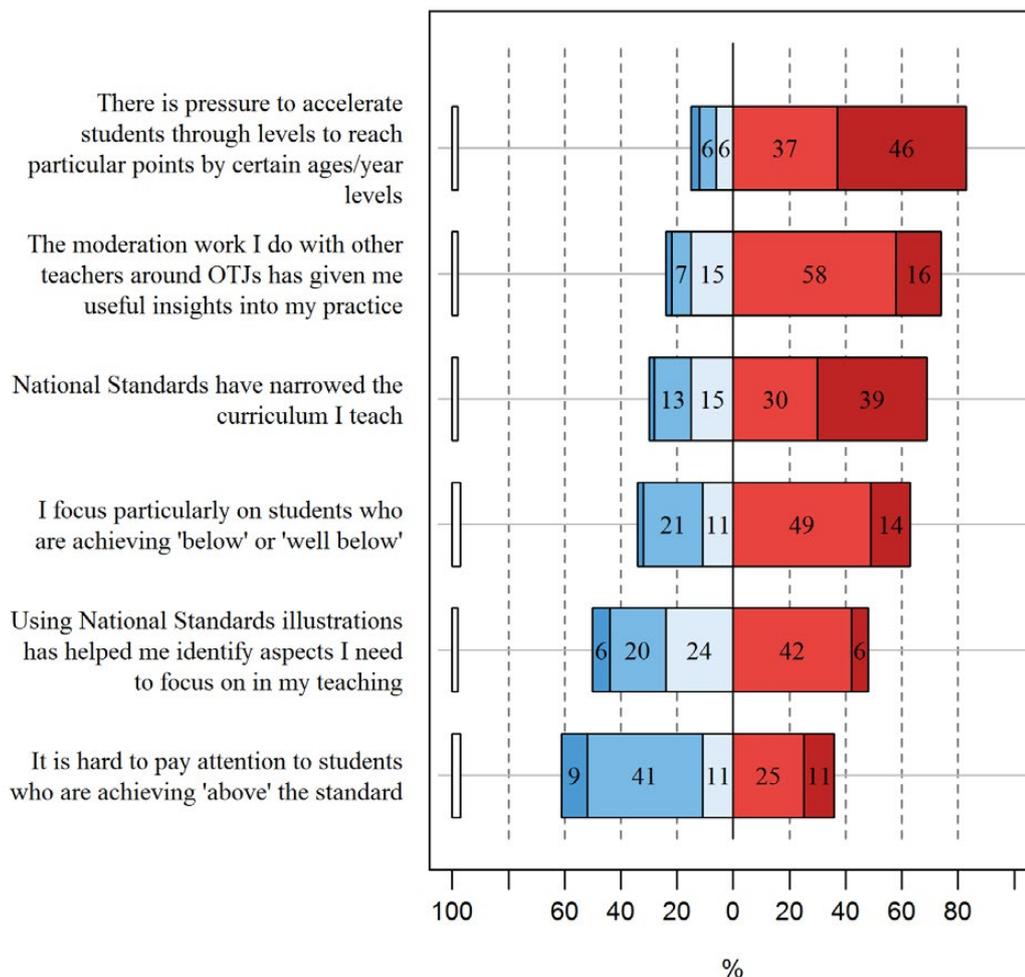
Teachers' responses indicated National Standards were affecting how they teach and what they teach (see Figure 5). The overall picture was of a sharper focus on accelerating learning for students not achieving National Standards, accompanied by a narrowing of curriculum they teach.

Eighty-three percent of teachers reported feeling pressure to accelerate students through levels to reach particular points by certain ages or year levels. In 2016, more teachers reported focusing particularly on students who are achieving 'below' or 'well below' (63%, compared with 47% in 2013). Alongside this was a slight increase in the proportion reporting it was hard focussing on students who are achieving 'above' the Standard (36%, compared with 30% in 2013).

In 2016, 69% of teachers thought the National Standards had narrowed the curriculum they teach, up from 50% in 2013.

Teachers' Standards-related work had had some benefits, with 74% of teachers agreeing the moderation work they do with other teachers around OTJs has given them useful insights into their practice, little changed from 70% in 2013. Almost half agreed that using National Standards illustrations had helped them identify aspects they need to focus on in their teaching.

FIGURE 5 Effects of National Standards on teaching, reported by teachers



No response
  Strongly disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral/Not sure
  Agree
  Strongly agree

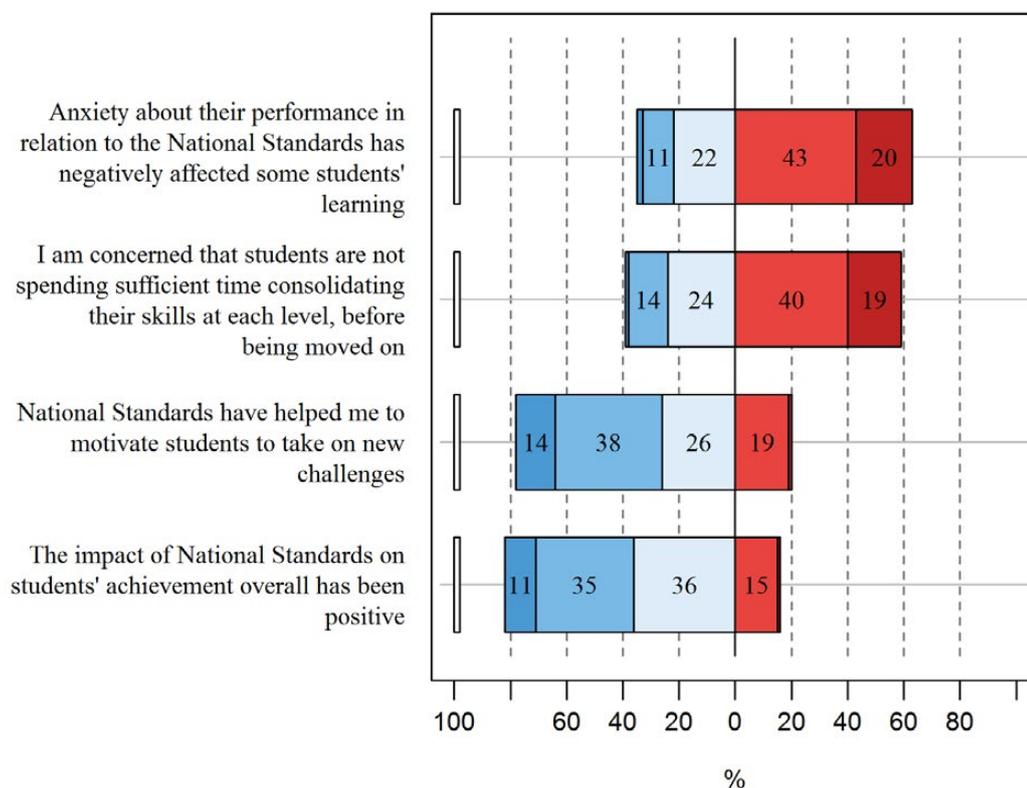
### Effects of National Standards on students and their learning

Teachers' responses about the effects of National Standards on students and their learning (see Figure 6) suggest this is an area of increasing concern. In 2016, 63% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that anxiety about their performance on National Standards has negatively affected some students' learning, compared with 41% in 2013.<sup>23</sup> A greater proportion of teachers of Years 4–8 students agreed or strongly agreed (70%) than those teaching Years 0–3 students (57%).

More than half the teachers thought that students are not spending sufficient time consolidating their skills at each level, before being moved on. Much smaller proportions of teachers agreed the impact of National Standards on students' achievement overall has been positive (16%) or that they have helped them motivate students to take on new challenges (20%). A greater proportion of teachers of Year 7–8 students reported National Standards helping them motivate students (29%, compared with 18% of teachers of younger students).

<sup>23</sup> Other items included in Figure 6 were new to the survey in 2016.

FIGURE 6 Effects of National Standards on students and their learning, reported by teachers (n = 771)



No response
  Strongly disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral/Not sure
  Agree
  Strongly agree

### Associations with school characteristics and use of PaCT

We found few differences in teacher responses related to the type of school they taught in, the year level they taught or whether they had used PaCT.

School decile was associated with only a few relatively small differences, consistent with the principals' pattern. A higher proportion of teachers at decile 9–10 schools than those at schools of other deciles reported:

- they are supportive of National Standards in principle (44% agreed they were, compared with teachers in other decile schools, in the 27–35% range)
- National Standards data from their school provide a reliable picture of their students' performance (54%, generally decreasing to 45% for decile 1–2 schools).

A higher proportion of teachers at decile 1–2 schools reported:

- being concerned that students are not spending sufficient time consolidating their skills at each level, before being moved on (68%, generally decreasing to 54% for decile 9–10 schools)
- disagreement that most of their parents and whānau understand the National Standards (72%, generally decreasing to 63% for decile 9–10 schools).

There were only minor differences in teacher responses related to their school's location or size, or the year level they taught.

On several points, teachers who used PaCT (n = 67) tended to have more positive views than teachers who had not used it. Sixty-four percent of those who had used it agreed the National Standards data from their

school provide a reliable picture of their students' performance, compared with 47% of teachers who had not used PaCT. More PaCT users also felt that there has been enough guidance and support available for them to feel confident about their work on the National Standards (63% compared with 48% of non-PaCT users). A higher proportion of PaCT users indicated most of their parents and whānau understand the National Standards (24%, compared with 12% of those who had not used PaCT).

### Trustees' views

Sixty-one percent of trustees thought there had been enough support and guidance available to their school's staff to feel confident about the school's work with National Standards (see Figure 7). This was up from 52% in 2013. Fifty-seven percent of trustees supported National Standards in principle, little changed from 61% in 2013.

Almost half (48%) of trustees agreed or strongly agreed National Standards provide a valuable record of student learning, up from 39% in 2013.

FIGURE 7 Trustees' views of National Standards

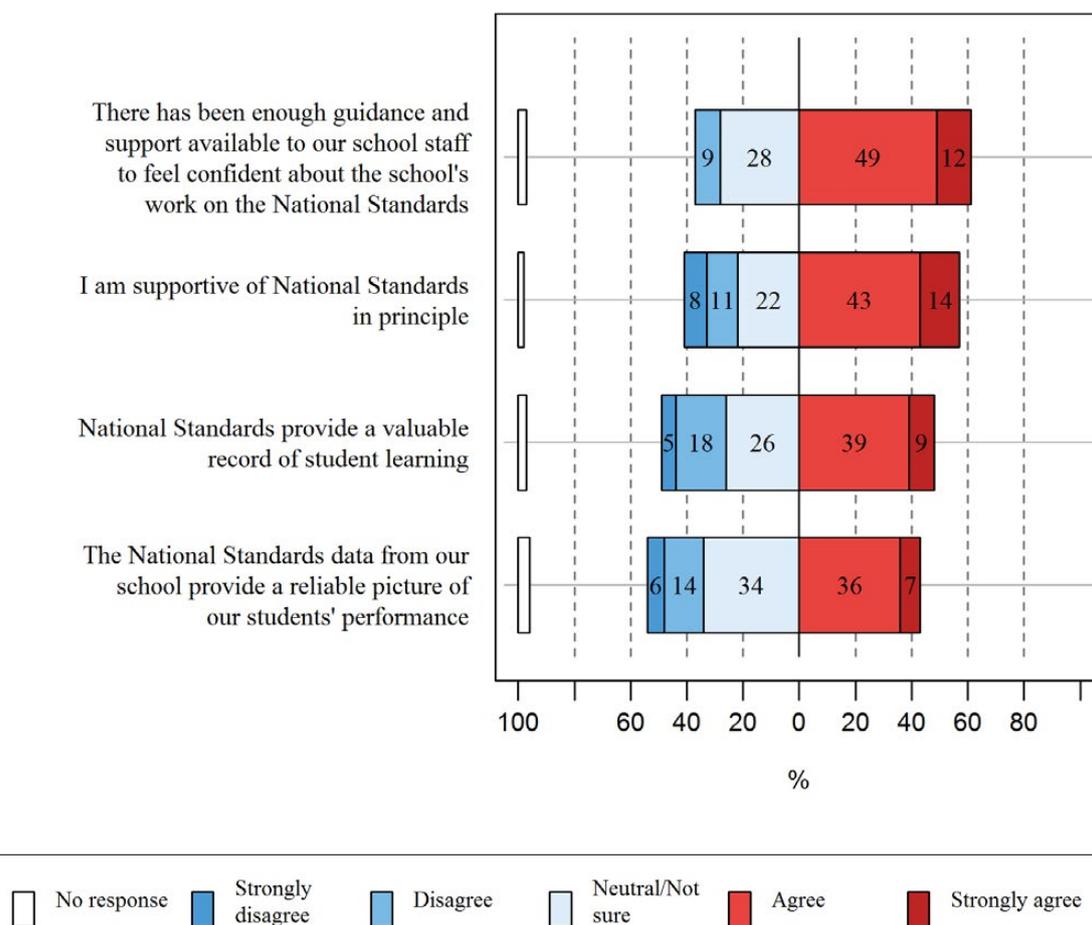
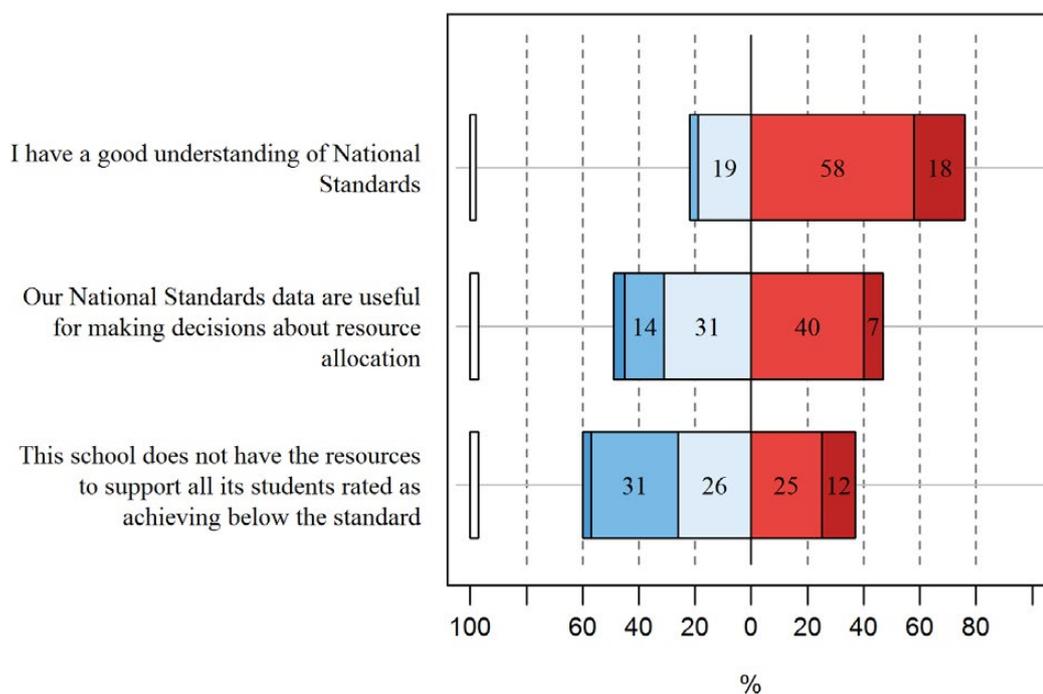


Figure 8 shows that just over three-quarters (76%) of trustees reported having a good understanding of National Standards—around the same proportion as 2013. There was a slight increase in trustees' agreement that their National Standards data are useful for making decisions about resource allocation (47%, up from 40% in 2013). The proportion of trustees who agreed their school does not have the resources to support all its students rated as achieving below the Standard (37%) was almost matched by the proportion who disagreed (34%). This item was not associated with school decile.

FIGURE 8 Trustees' understanding of National Standards and their usefulness at their school



No response
  Strongly disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral/Not sure
  Agree
  Strongly agree

Greater proportions of board chairs than other trustees:

- were supportive of National Standards in principle (66%, compared with 43% of other trustees)
- agreed National Standards data from their school provide a reliable picture of their students' performance (48%, compared with 34% of other trustees).

A higher proportion of trustees at large schools indicated their school does not have the resources to support all students rated at achieving below the Standard (46%, compared with 37% for medium–large schools, 31% for small–medium schools, and 32% for small schools<sup>24</sup>). There were no differences associated with school decile or location in trustees' responses to items about National Standards.

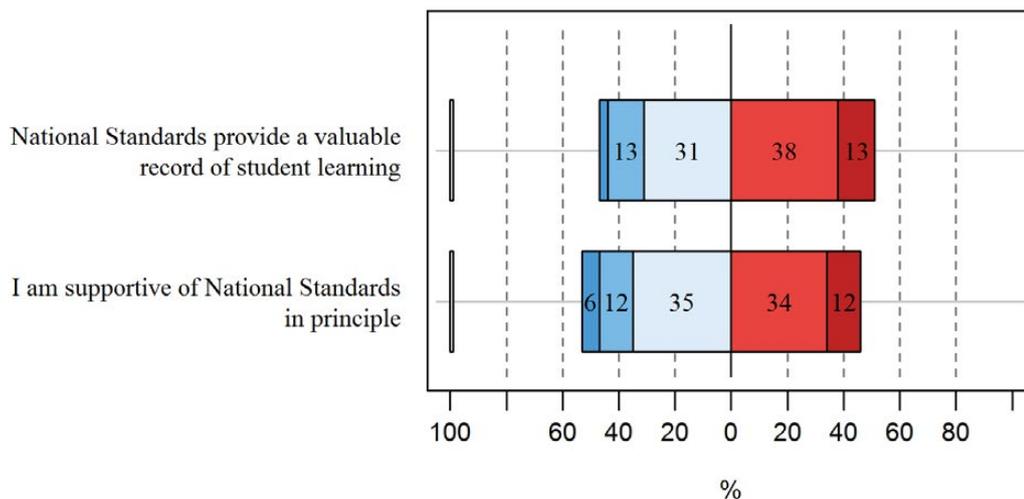
Just under half (48%) of trustees agreed National Standards provide a valuable record of student learning—slightly more than 39% who agreed in 2013.

## Parent and whānau views

Forty-five percent of parents and whānau agreed or strongly agreed they support National Standards in principle, and slightly more (51%) thought National Standards provide a valuable record of learning (see Figure 9). Around one-third of parents responded neutral/not sure to these items.

24 We define small schools as having 100 students or fewer; small–medium schools have from 101 to 200 students; medium–large schools have from 201 to 350 students; and large schools have 351 students or more.

FIGURE 9 Parent and whānau views about the value of National Standards

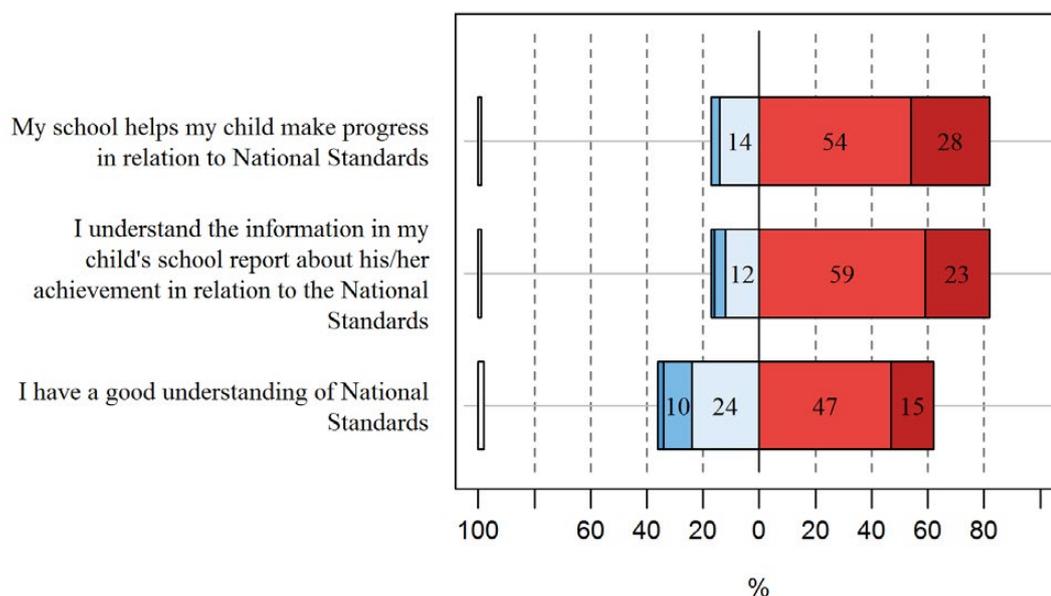


No response
  Strongly disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral/Not sure
  Agree
  Strongly agree

There were similar patterns of parents' responses to two new questions in the 2016 survey (see Figure 10). Eighty-two percent of parents and whānau agreed or strongly agreed they understand the National Standards information in their child's school report about his/her achievement in relation to the National Standards. Eighty-two percent agreed the school helps their child make progress in relation to National Standards.

A smaller proportion (62%) of parents and whānau indicated they have a good understanding of National Standards.

FIGURE 10 Parent and whānau views about National Standards (n = 504)



No response
  Strongly disagree
  Disagree
  Neutral/Not sure
  Agree
  Strongly agree

There were no differences associated with school location or size in parent and whānau responses to items about National Standards, and no trends linked with school decile.

### National Standards and schools' ongoing work with NZC

So how was the inclusion of National Standards associated with the work schools were doing with NZC? Were some schools achieving a blend of National Standards and their ongoing work with a more holistic enactment of NZC? Just over half of principals responded that NZC drives what they do in their school, 16% more than in 2013 (see Table 4). A similar proportion indicated their school was engaged in school-wide inquiry that involves using data to improve teaching and learning.

However, at the same time, 40% of principals reported the focus on literacy and mathematics has taken their attention away from other aspects of NZC—slightly more than had reported this in the previous survey. This echoes the increase in the proportion of teachers reporting National Standards had narrowed the curriculum they teach (69%, up from 50% in 2013).

TABLE 4 Principals' descriptions of their school's work with NZC overall, 2013 and 2016  
(NB: Principals could select multiple responses)

|  | 2013<br>(n = 180)<br>% | 2016<br>(n = 200)<br>% |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|
| We're engaged in school-wide inquiry that involves using data to improve teaching and learning | *                      | 56                     |
| NZC drives what we do in this school   | 38                     | 54                     |
| We're continuing to build approaches and practices that align with NZC                         | 36                     | 43                     |
| The focus on literacy and mathematics has taken our attention away from other aspects of NZC   | 34                     | 40                     |

\*Not asked

Twenty-six percent of principals reported both that they were engaged in school-wide inquiry that involves using data to improve teaching and learning, and that the focus on literacy and mathematics has taken their attention away from other aspects of NZC. Whether their school-wide inquiries were focused on literacy, mathematics or other parts of NZC is unknown.

What was clearer was the evidence suggesting that having their attention taken up with literacy and mathematics did not necessarily mean schools had stopped developing their work with NZC. Principals who indicated the focus on literacy and mathematics has taken their attention away from other aspects of NZC also reported:

- they were continuing to build approaches and practices that align with NZC (17% selected both these responses)
- NZC drives what they do in their school (17% selected both these responses).

Elsewhere in the 2016 survey, 32% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that *National Standards drive what we do in this school*.<sup>25</sup> It is unknown whether principals interpreted this in terms of, for example, having a focus on students who are 'below' or 'well below' Standards, or using their school's National Standards data to allocate resources, or related to reading, writing and mathematics being a focus for teachers' professional learning.

In 2016, there was a clear increase in a focus on teaching as inquiry (78% of principals indicated this had been a focus, compared with 63% in 2013). Around half of principals reported their staff having professional learning in mathematics and statistics and English (55% and 48%, respectively)—the two learning areas included in National Standards. These figures were marginally lower than in 2013 (59% and 54%, respectively).

## Comments about National Standards

All respondents were invited to write a comment about National Standards. To varying degrees, the comments from principals, teachers, trustees, parents and whānau, reflected the following main themes:

- National Standards data are not reliable
- National Standards do not reflect that children progress at different rates
- Negative effects of National Standards on students and their learning are cause for concern

<sup>25</sup> In 2013, this item was presented as one of several response options, whereas in 2016 it was presented with an agreement scale, meaning we cannot make direct comparisons between response rates.

- Negative effects of National Standards on teachers and teaching are cause for concern
- The curriculum being taught has narrowed to focus on reading, writing and mathematics
- The focus should be on identifying an individual's achievement, rather than attainment of set standards.

Some comments touch on several of these themes. Minor themes that emerged from small proportions of more than one respondent group's comments (e.g., 5% of principals and 4% of teachers made positive comments) are also included to ensure a fair representation of respondents' views.

Principals also had an opportunity to comment on NZC, and we include some comments here to illustrate how they were seeing the relationship between NZC and National Standards.

## Principals' comments

In the comments made by 43% of the principals ( $n = 86$ ) about National Standards, the unreliable nature of National Standards data was the most frequently mentioned theme (18% of all principals).

*Disparities of schools reporting on NS/OTJs (e.g., a student arrives—report states, 'Working towards' and we find they are 'well below' and the parents have no idea).*

*NS are a joke. Data coming to us from schools when students enrol here is highly unreliable. Our view is that without a National Test (WE DO NOT WANT NATIONAL HIGH STAKES TESTING!!!!) there is no accurate way of assessing whatever the data schools are submitting is truthful/correct. We are hard in our marking, we do not overstate student achievement, most probably we understate it. It is obvious that schools are not being truthful in their reporting of data because of the high levels of inaccuracy. OTJs cannot be accurately moderated within a school, let alone between local schools and definitely not between suburbs/cities etc. NS data being published by the MOE on Education Counts cannot be trusted.*

Nine percent commented that the focus should be on students' achievement, rather than their achievement of given standards.

*It is key that schools track progress consistently and use the data to plan effectively and track personalised progress, not progress tagged to age-related benchmarks.*

*Do not acknowledge the progress of students who are not achieving at the Standard but are making progress, but it is not enough to move out of the 'below' categories.*

The theme of National Standards not reflecting that children progress at different rates, especially those with additional learning needs, was evident in the comments made by 8% of principals.

*I particularly object to having to report on NS for our ORS students who make up 10% of our roll (and we are not a special school). It grossly affects the data recorded on Education Counts when many of our very high ORS are non-verbal, immobile, etc., etc. While they make progress it is obvious they are never going to meet NS and so we do not report to parents using them—how stupid and demeaning would that be.*

*The National Standards do not help with the inclusion of students with learning needs because the child generally will be working at a lower level than their age. In past years our special needs children's results have been included in whole-school results. The achievement and progress of those students who have IEPs [individual education plans] will be reported on separately from now on.*

Seven percent of principals voiced concern about the negative effects of National Standards on students and their learning.

*Good idea but each child will have different abilities. What about the child who is 'below' from 5 years–12 years old. How do they feel?*

*It is soul destroying for students who are well below—we used to celebrate their small achievements—now they are just well below! :(*

*Overall, National Standards have led to a deterioration in the educational deal our children are receiving.*

Principals' other comments about National Standards included the following themes:

- A variety of critical comments not covered under other themes (9%)
- National Standards measure a narrow set of skills and do not give a holistic picture of a student's achievement (6%)
- Positive comments (5%)

When we asked principals for any comments they wanted to make about NZC, 35% ( $n = 69$ ) responded. Seventeen percent of all principals (almost half those who commented) made positive remarks about the nature of the document, such as:

*It's awesome. Really works well for our school and 'fits' with the way we work.*

*Brilliant world-leading document. Gives the freedom to meet the needs of our community.*

Alongside comments like these that highlight the benefits of being able to develop a local curriculum, 12% of principals commented that they were concerned about the possible effect of National Standards on the work their school was doing with NZC.

*Literacy and maths, especially National Standards and ERO being totally focused on them, is moving us more and more to a narrowing focus.*

*The NZC is an amazing document. As a staff it has been challenging to try and explore the length and breadth of possibilities. National Standards expectations have narrowed our abilities to extend learning opportunities.*

*It is a fantastic document—the pressure to have 85% of students at above National Standards could get in the way of providing a well-rounded education if we let it!*

Another 12% of principals wrote comments that indicated they had continued their NZC development.

*Increasing focus on key competencies is valuable. Flexibility of NZC allows us to focus on areas of importance/relevance for us e.g., transitions. Some focus areas e.g., Good Citizenship, student agency and curriculum/Learning Areas with needs identified through data are ongoing focus areas, but tend to have slightly different aspects of focus.*

*Schools choose to narrow their own curriculum. This is not a policy choice but schools' own choice. Our curriculum has significantly widened over the last 4–5 years because we chose for that to be the case.*

### Teachers' comments

Forty-four percent of teachers ( $n = 339$ ) wrote comments about National Standards, and concern about negative effects on students and their learning was a main theme (13% of all teachers).

*Labels children from an early age. National Standards has helped label our Pasifika and Māori students as 'below' achievers, it doesn't take into account the added value of the child's own learning.*

*I find the whole push for acceleration very dangerous as many children are getting insufficient consolidation and fall down later because they do not have a solid grounding.*

Occasionally overlapping with these comments were those that made the point that students learn at different rates and have different learning needs, made by 12% of teachers.

*Definitely not designed for ESOL or learning needs students. Also not set up to support students who come in with no skills when they start school. Also don't support transient students.*

*Students with high and very high needs—who are unable to access the NZ Curriculum at Level One—are expected to reach a National standard—what a joke! 10% of our school roll are ORS funded students and are 'well below the standard' for their time at school.*

The other most frequently mentioned theme in teachers' comments was that the focus should be on identifying and reporting a student's individual progress, rather than their achievement—or not—of a set standard (10% of teachers).

*National Standards do not accurately recognise the progress of some students, in particular 'well below' and 'below' students. A student can arrive at 'below', work as hard as they can all year and still be 'below'. National Standards do not acknowledge or show this progress. This can be very demotivating for these students.*

*National Standards are a terrible way to measure student achievement as it does not include specific progress within a level. Students may make huge individual progress within their own ability, however parents/caregivers are only concerned if their child is 'AT' National Standards.*

A smaller proportion of teachers (8%) made comments about National Standards data being unreliable.

*National Standards—what are they? Huge variance across schools with interpretation and within schools.*

*When moderating writing with teachers who are new to our school, we seem to be particularly harsh and marking at 'below' harshly. However, the e-asTTle (writing) tools or PaCT (maths) seem still to have room for argument and therefore different schools could mark same child, same samples even, at 'at', 'below' or 'above', easily.*

The same proportion (8%) described particular issues around National Standards in the first 3 years of school.

*National Standards for children under Year 3 are not realistic. At 5 years old, children arrive at school with a huge variety of skills and knowledge. Preschools (in our area) are not teaching expected behaviours for their transition into school. We spend a huge percentage of our time on behaviour management because of this. Also depending on parents/whānau, some children can use a pencil, some take weeks to learn this. For the same reason, children's reading levels differ greatly, depending on their alphabet knowledge and prior learning. Most children don't reach NS for reading until at least Year 3, due to reasons noted.*

*National Standards cause great stress to parents of children who are classified 'below'. National Standards should not exist for children in the first few years at school.*

Concern about the negative effects of National Standards on teachers and teaching were voiced by 8% of teachers.

*It hones teachers' focus to see where they need specific learning. But I feel that my 'at' and 'above' students miss out on me spending as much time with them.*

*I feel we are teaching to the standards and missing many opportunities for spontaneous teaching.*

*It can be daunting and stressful as a teacher when you have to get children 'to the standard' when there is so much to cover.*

Most of the remainder of teachers' comments touched on:

- Concern about the reporting of National Standards data (7%)
- The curriculum being taught has narrowed to focus on reading, writing and mathematics (5%)
- National Standards measure a narrow set of skills and do not give a holistic picture of a student's achievement (5%)
- Positive comments (4%).

## Trustees' comments

Thirty-eight percent ( $n = 66$ ) of trustees wrote comments about National Standards. The two most frequently occurring themes in their comments were concern about schools' practices with reporting Standards data (8% of all trustees) and impacts this could have on how their own school was perceived.

*Unsure why we have to include data from our special education students. Causes our results to be very distorted.*

*Not all schools report their data in a fully transparent manner so comparison between schools isn't always reliable.*

Seven percent of trustees wrote comments about the negative effects of National Standards on students and their learning.

*Not convinced this is the best way to assess kids for their benefit or their parents but it helps the BOT work out how we are going as a school + target resources where needed. Doesn't help the kids to know they are 'well below'.*

*Labelling someone 'well below' is not motivating to them. Thus not helping raise standards.*

Unreliability of National Standards data was a theme in 6% of trustees' comments.

*Some schools are harder on themselves than others, so when comparing results a better school appears not as good.*

*The teacher OTJs are a concern as it could be different between schools and areas.*

Some made positive comments about National Standards (6%).

*The introduction of NS has had a positive effect in getting teachers to discuss and critically reflect on the judgements they make about students' learning.*

*In some cases National Standards appear to be a little harsh, but in principle I like the idea of a tool to get clear picture of achievement ... As a parent who has been around since NS was introduced I can see benefit.*

Concern about negative effects on teachers and teaching was evident in comments made by 6% of trustees, such as:

*National Standards have also added hugely to our teachers' workloads. As the employer, our board worries about the wellbeing of staff under an ever-increasing workload.*

*Too much data collection—this takes a lot of our teachers' valuable teaching time. The Standards only provide a record as that has been the expectation for measuring student achievement in recent years. Our teachers should be teaching, not constantly testing and measuring.*

Trustees also commented that: National Standards do not suit all children because they learn at different rates (5%); National Standards measure a narrow set of skills and do not give a holistic picture of a student's achievement (5%); and, the focus should be on students' achievement, rather than their achievement of given standards (also 5%).

## **Parent and whānau comments**

In the comments 27% of parents and whānau ( $n = 137$ ) wrote about National Standards, the two most frequently mentioned themes related to students. Like principals, teachers and trustees, parents commented that National Standards do not recognise that children progress at different rates and are not suited to students with additional learning needs (7% of parents).

*I believe every child learns at their own pace and ability, not all children are going to achieve the National Standard levels at the same time. This can be a disadvantage for some children who are then labelled as slow learners.*

*Assessing ORS students by National Standards is demeaning of their progress/achievements and discourages schools to welcome them. Our son's 'well below' is easily identifiable on school-wide reports sent out to community—publication of these results is invasion of his privacy as his performance is easily identifiable and is a measure that is irrelevant to him as he is vastly different from his peers.*

I do not agree with National Standards as they discriminate against our special needs children, always keeping them below average with no areas of individuality.

Sometimes overlapping with the theme of not recognising that children progress at different rates, 5% of parents voiced concern about the negative effects of National Standards on students. Their concerns included the labelling of students whose achievement was below National Standards being demotivating and impacting their self-esteem; students being pushed on without consolidating new learning; and the achievement of students operating well above National Standards not being reflected also proving demotivating.

*All kids are different and categorising them under one single umbrella is wrong. My child is dyslexic and of course 'fails' at reading and writing under the National Standards.*

*In some cases I feel that children are being rushed through their work in order to reach the National Standards. I feel that too much emphasis is put on this and some children are slipping through the system.*

*Children are at different stages so National Standards for children underachieving aren't healthy as children feel like failures, which is NOT what we want.*

*My daughter ranks well above average, however the National Standards don't require that information. Only wanting to know up to 'above'. Makes the data false in my eyes. Pointless.*

In the remainder of parent and whānau comments, the most frequently mentioned additional themes related to:

- National Standards measuring a narrow set of skills rather than giving a holistic picture of a student's achievement (4%)
- Not yet knowing enough to understand National Standards, or finding them confusing (4%).

## 6.

# Discussion

In the seventh year of National Standards in New Zealand schools experiences of them varied, including the relationships between National Standards and schools' ongoing work with NZC. Compared with 2013, more principals indicated NZC drives what they do in their school. There has been no increase since 2013 in the proportion who reported National Standards drive what they do in the school.

Although more principals than in 2013 thought there had been enough guidance and support available for their school staff to feel confident about the school's work with National Standards, more than half of the principals and close to half of the teachers did not agree this was the case. One aspect of professional learning and sharing that has been productive is moderation of OTJs. Almost three-quarters of the teachers reported gaining insights into their practice from moderating OTJs with other teachers. A smaller proportion of principals (35%) indicated their school works with other schools to moderate OTJs.

Few of those who worked most closely with students thought National Standards had made a positive impact on students' achievement overall. Although one-fifth of teachers reported National Standards helped them to motivate students to take on new challenges, nearly two-thirds of teachers voiced concern about the anxiety some students felt about their National Standards performance and the negative effect this had on these students' learning.

There was some evidence of a move away from the use of the four levels ('well below', 'below', 'at', 'above') in reporting students' National Standards performance to parents and whānau—a move that had been previously recommended.<sup>26</sup> A theme in respondents' comments was a preference for a focus on identifying and reporting an individual student's progress, rather than their achievement of a given standard. This was particularly applicable to students with additional learning needs, whose small amounts of progress are unlikely to be reflected in terms of National Standards.

Less than two-thirds of parents and whānau indicated they have a good understanding of National Standards. More positively, most parents and whānau thought they received clear information about

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Thrupp, M. (2014). At the eye of the storm: Researching schools and their communities enacting National Standards, 2013 Herbison Lecture. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 49, 6–20.

See also Wylie, M., & Berg, M. (2013). *National Standards: What difference are they making?* Paper presented at NZARE conference, 26–28 December, Dunedin. Available at <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/national-survey>

their child's performance related to National Standards (between 85% and 87% for reading, writing and mathematics) as part of mid-year reporting. However, barely half of parents and whānau agreed that National Standards provide a valuable picture of children's learning.

Overall, the picture from the 2016 NZCER national survey responses indicates that, while the National Standards have been incorporated into teaching and learning and used by school leaders as indicators of student need, experiences of using them continue to raise questions about their role in student learning and performance, more than 6 years later.

To make the National Standards more productive for teaching and learning, it would seem that the recommendations from NZCER's 2013 analysis of its national survey data (summarised on p. 6 of this report) are still applicable.

In addition, schools need more support to make greater use of the Learning Progressions Frameworks that underpin National Standards to identify what learning progress looks like, between one National Standard and the next. This is especially important for students with additional learning needs, who work within one curriculum level for a sustained period. Taking a focus on individuals' progress, rather than (simply) their attainment (or not) of a given standard, would avoid unhelpful labelling of a student's performance and thereby help reduce the anxiety teachers reported seeing in some of their students. Information about progress might provide more parents and whānau with a valuable record of their child's learning.



