

# **Primary school principals' perspectives from the 2024 National Survey**

**Uiuinga ā-Motu o ngā Kura**



**Mengnan Li and Jo MacDonald, with Sally Boyd,  
Rachel Bolstad, Jackson Rowe-Williams, Jessie  
Dong, Keita Durie, Esther Smaill, Georgia Palmer,  
and Hinemaia Kupenga-Keefe**

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May 2025

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Finally, we are deeply appreciative of the principals who took the time to complete the 2024 national survey.

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# He whakarāpopototanga | Executive summary

NZCER conducted the National Survey of Primary Schools from October to December 2024. We invited principals from a nationally representative sample of all English-medium full primary, contributing, and intermediate schools in Aotearoa New Zealand to complete our survey.

A sample of 324 principals was invited to participate in the survey. After data cleaning, the final responses included in this report were from 187 principals, giving a response rate of 58%.

NZCER has run a National Survey of Primary Schools regularly since 1989, with the last survey of primary school principals taking place in 2019. This enables us to monitor trends over time.

The report presents the findings in each of the six survey domains alongside a section on principals' working experiences and future plans.

Key findings that stood out to us in each of the survey domains were:

## Support and resourcing

- Despite mixed views on the Equity Index (EQI) system, schools facing more socioeconomic challenges were more likely to see benefits from equity funding changes.
- Three-quarters of principals indicated their schools have sufficient space and buildings in good condition, but nearly half indicated they had unmet property needs.
- Most principals were positive about the advice and support they received from education agencies and organisations.
- Principals identified a growing need for external expertise in mental health, trauma, and differentiated teaching for students with learning support needs, but access to this support was limited.
- Compared with 2019, fewer principals reported major issues facing their schools, with fewer principals (49%, down from 72% in 2019) feeling that “too much is being asked of schools”. Of concern is that 82% of principals indicated that “Support for students with complex learning, social and emotional needs” is a major issue facing their school.

## Collaborative relationships

- Nearly all principals indicated that Te Tiriti o Waitangi was valued, and ongoing teacher learning and self-reflection were practised in their schools.
- Schools' interactions with local hapū and iwi were increasing, while working collaboratively with Pacific families and communities could be strengthened.
- Nearly all schools were working with whānau and communities to improve attendance, although some require better access to good support.

## Curriculum and assessment

- Seventy percent of principals supported the direction of the curriculum changes, but a similar proportion (71%) were concerned about the pace.
- Principals generally felt positive or neutral about the benefits of changes in the English and math and statistics learning areas for students.
- Nearly half of principals indicated that a structured approach would require changes to their maths teaching, while about a third felt the same for literacy.
- Formative assessment underpinned school assessment practices, and principals continued to trust the assessment information they have access to.

## Teaching and learning

- Most schools actively promoted te reo Māori, with a potential to involve whānau more in planning and implementation.
- However, most schools do not offer opportunities for ākonga to learn in a reo Māori bilingual or immersion setting. Of the 33 schools that offered this opportunity, a third could not accommodate all ākonga who applied.
- Most principals reported challenges in finding kaiako to teach te reo Māori.
- Two-thirds of principals were having conversations about AI, with many expressing a need for more information and professional learning and development (PLD).

## Inclusion

- Most principals reported that students had good access to assistive technologies at school, although digital access at home remained inequitable.
- Most schools have practices in place that affirmed ākonga Māori identities, but there has been a slight decline since 2019. Compared with 2019, there were also fewer schools that used practices that affirmed the identities of Pacific students.
- In an open-ended question, principals were asked to describe the most effective thing their school has done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for four groups of students:
  - o For ākonga Māori, the most common response from principals was the importance of engaging whānau, and embedding tikanga, te reo, and te ao Māori values into school-wide practices. Professional development for staff was equally critical.
  - o For Pacific students, about half the principals responded, and the most common response was related to teaching and learning, and particularly that culturally responsive pedagogies had been effective.
  - o For students with additional learning support needs, the most common response was employing additional staff and engaging with specialist staff.
  - o For students with complex social and emotional needs (a new group added to this question in the 2024 survey), most principals highlighted the importance of supportive collaborations with in-school specialist staff, teacher aides, and specialist services such as psychologists.

## Wellbeing

- Most principals (89%) enjoyed their job, but 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their work-related stress was manageable. Consistent with the 2016 and 2019 surveys, almost all principals (93%) worked more than 50 hours per week.

- Around half of schools had well-embedded systems to identify individual students with social or mental health needs.
- A similar proportion (53%) reported that support for the wellbeing of students with disabilities or additional learning support needs was well embedded, a decrease from 74% in 2019.
- Most schools had embedded approaches for promoting positive student behaviour.
- The main reason for schools not using support services was a lack of access, rather than a lack of need.

### Principals' working experiences and future plans

- We asked principals what they would like to change about their work as a principal. Consistent with previous surveys, they continued to want more time for leadership, reflection, and innovation.
- Many principals planned to stay in their roles, with fewer planning to lead another school but more considering a career outside education than in 2019.
- Two-thirds of the 31 new principals felt well prepared for their role.

## Responding to the research questions

The 2024 National Survey of Primary Schools addresses five research questions on how the education system in Aotearoa New Zealand is progressing over time in: 1) honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi; 2) serving ākonga Māori; 3) serving Pacific students; 4) achieving equitable outcomes for all learners; and 5) supporting the success of everyone within the system, while assessing the impacts of recent policy changes and identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Most principals reported a strong commitment to **honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi** indicating that it is enacted through school values and daily practices, and with growing engagement with hapū and iwi, particularly in curriculum planning. However, deeper and broader partnerships remain limited.

Challenges remain in **serving ākonga Māori**. While most schools actively promote te reo Māori, only some schools offer reo Māori learning opportunities and practices that affirm ākonga Māori identities, and barriers—such as difficulty in finding kaiako to teach te reo Māori—persist. A decline in schools reporting identity-affirming practices for ākonga Māori signals the need for stronger systemic support and sustainable implementation.

Regarding **serving Pacific students**, although some schools are very focused on the needs of their Pacific students, fewer schools in 2024 reported having identity-affirming practices compared with 2019. Continued progress will require schools to deepen cultural responsiveness and collaborate more closely with Pacific families and communities.

In addressing the broader goal of **achieving equitable outcomes for all students**, the transition to the EQI system has shown some positive effects, particularly for schools in high socioeconomic need areas. These schools reported greater access to healthy food programmes and were more likely to benefit from EQI funding, but continued to face ongoing challenges in teacher recruitment, attendance, and digital access. Student wellbeing has emerged as a top concern, with increased demand for mental health services and a noticeable decline in the embedding of wellbeing-focused practices since 2019.

Finally, regarding **support for all people in the system**, principals acknowledged the direction of the curriculum changes and the potential benefits but expressed concern about the pace of change. Concerns also remain around access to support and resources, and their own workload, with more considering careers outside of education. Moving forward, efforts are needed to ensure that the system can support all stakeholders equitably and effectively.

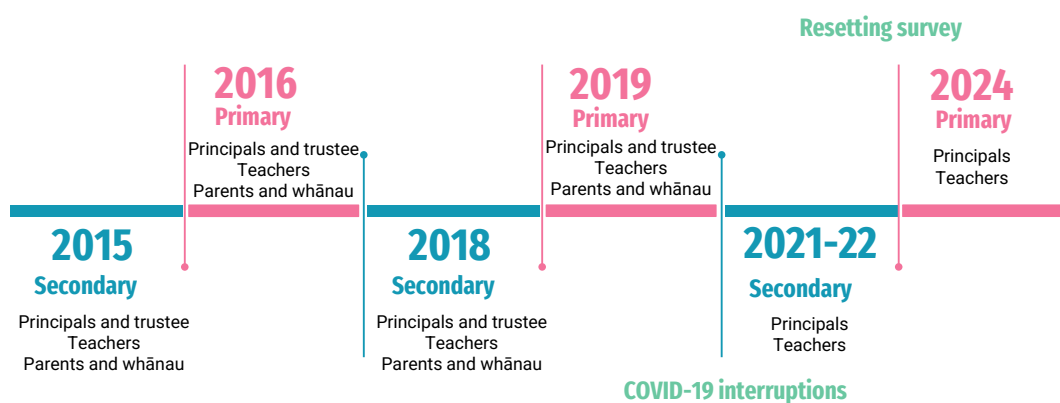
# 1. He kupu whakataki | Introduction

## About the national survey

The purpose of the national survey is to monitor educational trends and policy impacts over time. The intention is to provide a comprehensive national picture of education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

NZCER began regular surveys of English-medium primary schools in 1989 when the Tomorrow's Schools reforms were implemented. In 2003, a regular survey of English-medium secondary schools was added to the suite. The national surveys have run on a 3-yearly cycle since then<sup>1</sup> (see Figure 1 for the most recent cycles). They have been a core component of NZCER's Te Pae Tawhiti programme, funded through NZCER's Government Grant.

FIGURE 1 Timeline of the most recent national surveys



In 2024, we “reset” the survey with the aim of building on the strengths of the earlier national surveys and delivering a refreshed option that continues to give the sector reliable, valid, and useful data and insights. Below is a summary of the key changes from the 2024 reset:

- High-level thinking:
  - o introduction of a three-phased reset initiative aimed at refining the national survey from inception to evaluation
  - o development of explicit overarching research questions (as shown below).
- Data collection:
  - o addition of a new step in data collection to gain feedback about survey domains and topic areas from potential participants and key stakeholders
  - o increased use and integration of technology to streamline data collection, data analysis, and reporting processes.

<sup>1</sup> There were two surveys of Early Childhood Education (ECE) services, in 2003–04 and in 2007.

- Survey design:
  - o introduction of a new framework for the national survey suite (Appendix A), outlining key domains applicable to each respondent group<sup>2</sup> and the collective
  - o streamlining of the surveys by removing duplication and implementing branching logic to reduce length
  - o incorporation of participants' feedback into the survey design, which also facilitated advance notification of the actual survey to potential participants.
- Reporting:
  - o an individualised school summary for participating schools with more than 10 teacher respondents.

## Research questions

The 2024 NZCER National Survey of Primary Schools has been fully redesigned. The aim is to monitor educational trends and policy impacts in Aotearoa New Zealand over time, by addressing the following research questions:

- Question 1: To what extent and in what ways is the system honouring and enacting with Te Tiriti o Waitangi? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 2: To what extent and in what ways is the system serving ākonga Māori? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 3: To what extent and in what ways is the system serving Pacific students? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 4: To what extent and in what ways is the system designed and supported to achieve equitable outcomes for all students? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 5: To what extent and in what ways are all people in the system supported to succeed? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?

## Reading the report

This report is organised into the following sections:

- Section 1 He kupu whakataki | Introduction
- Section 2 He tukanga | Methodology
- Section 3 He kitenga | Findings from six survey domains as listed below, alongside a section on principals' working experiences and future plans:
  - o Support and resourcing
  - o Collaborative relationships
  - o Curriculum and assessment
  - o Teaching and learning
  - o Inclusion
  - o Wellbeing
- Section 4 He matapaki | Discussion

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<sup>2</sup> The framework includes students, parents and whānau, teachers, principals, and board members. We surveyed principals and teachers in 2024, to prioritise resource and minimise the burden on schools.

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## 2. He tukanga | Methodology

### Participants

The 2024 national survey engaged **principals** and **teachers** from a nationally representative sample of all English-medium full primary, contributing, and intermediate schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. This report presents the findings from the principal survey. The findings from the teacher survey are presented in a separate report.

Data collection took place from 16 October to 5 December 2024. A sample of 324 principals was invited to participate in the survey and 243 responses were received. After data cleaning,<sup>3</sup> the final responses included in this report were from 187 principals, leading to a response rate of 58%. This is higher than the response rate in 2019 (41%) and exceeds the average response rate of other online surveys in published research.<sup>4</sup> Assuming a 95% critical value, the margin of error for the principal survey was 6.8%. The responses are nationally representative by School Equity Index (EQI) Groups<sup>5</sup> and broadly representative by area and region. Full information about participating principals' demographics and school characteristics (gender, ethnicity, school EQI group, area, region, and school type) are shown in Appendix B.

### Survey design and implementation

Figure 2 provides an overview of the new approach to 2024 survey design and implementation. Further elaboration on each step in survey design and implementation is provided below. Key changes are a move from a predominantly paper-based comprehensive survey to a shorter online survey, and the introduction of “pre-survey” voting to garner priorities from potential participants in schools and stakeholders in educational agencies and organisations.

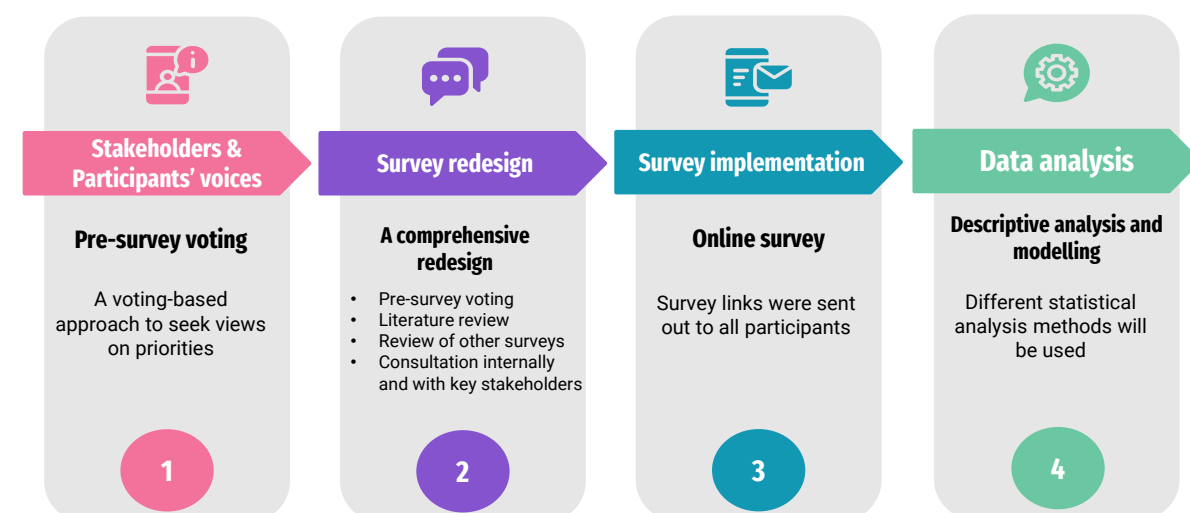
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3 Data were excluded if: 1) they did not come from the targeted sample; 2) respondents provided only the school's name without further information; or 3) duplicate responses were submitted from the same school.

4 For a discussion on average response rates of online surveys, see meta-analysis by Wu et al. (2022): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2451958822000409>

5 There are three School EQI Groups (Fewer, Moderate, and More) as indicated in the diagram from <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data-services/guidelines/school-equity-index-bands-and-groups>.

FIGURE 2 An overview of survey design and implementation



## Pre-survey of participants and other stakeholders

We used a pre-survey voting approach to collect feedback from full primary, contributing, and intermediate school principals, teachers, and key educational agencies and organisations. Participants were provided with the potential survey domains and asked to identify the key areas they were particularly interested in. Respondents were also encouraged to share their thoughts on what would motivate them to complete the national survey.

The pre-survey voting enabled us to incorporate sector feedback about current and emerging topics or issues in education into our survey design. Additionally, it allowed us to provide participants with advance notice before the actual survey release.

## Survey redesign

In addition to the feedback from pre-survey voting, other inputs were also considered during the survey design stage, including a scan of existing literature review and policy documents with strategic priorities for education, recent research on domain topics, internal consultation at NZCER, and further consultation with key educational agencies and organisations.

In developing questions and items for each domain in the framework, we balanced the introduction of new questions with the inclusion of those that provide valuable longitudinal data. We also minimised duplication across the teacher and principal surveys, unless differing perspectives on an issue were essential.

## Survey implementation

As of July 2024, there were approximately 1,877 English-medium primary schools (including full primary, contributing, and intermediate) in New Zealand, according to Education Counts. A stratified sampling approach was used to draw a nationally representative sample of schools. In October 2024, an email invitation was sent out to principals of 324 sampled English-medium primary, contributing, and intermediate schools. The email invitation outlined the project's overarching goals and featured

a summary paragraph of the results of the pre-survey voting. The email to principals also included instructions about engaging their teachers, along with two survey links: one for principals and the other for teachers.

After sending initial email invitations and reminders, we followed up with phone calls to schools that had not responded. When a principal declined participation, we replaced their school with another demographically similar one and made an attempt to engage them. Additionally, we publicised the survey through the NZCER newsletter and worked with other educational organisations (e.g., NZPF and NZEI) to improve its visibility.

## Data analysis

There were four components to our data analysis approach. The focus is on providing survey respondents and key educational agencies and organisations with timely feedback and survey results.

### Pre-survey voting results

The pre-survey voting results were analysed and used to inform the survey design. We also compiled and incorporated a concise summary of the results into the invitation email sent to participants.

### Individualised school summary

As part of the “reset” initiative, our goal this year was to provide a summary report to each school with more than 10 teacher responses.<sup>6</sup> The school summary was produced based on aggregated data from the teacher survey, with the aim of providing valuable insights for schools and encouraging principals and teachers to participate in the national surveys in the future.

### Descriptive analysis

The analysis and reporting of previous national surveys have predominantly relied on descriptive results. This year, we continued to utilise descriptive analysis to illustrate the overarching patterns that emerged. The advantage of descriptive analysis lies in its ability to succinctly summarise and present key findings, providing a clear understanding of the data without necessitating complex statistical techniques.

Hypothesis testing<sup>7</sup> was conducted for closed survey questions to examine if there were statistically significant associations between principals' views and main school characteristics (e.g., School EQI Groups, school size, school type, and region) as well as individuals' characteristics (e.g., years of principal experience and principal ethnicity). A few associations were found to be statistically significant and have been included in the report.

When the same items were asked of principals in the 2019 National Survey of Primary Schools, we report any marked changes (i.e., over 5 percentage points). This provides some indication of whether principals' views have changed over time; however, care is needed when interpreting these differences given our new approach this year (e.g., changes to the survey items and scales).

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6 At the end of the teacher survey, consent was obtained from teachers for their data to be included in the school summary. Only one school had more than 10 teachers who consented, and a school summary was provided for that school.

7 Chi-square tests for independence were used throughout the report. False Discovery Rate was applied to account for the inflated Type 1 error rate and to ensure we only report on results that are both statistically significant and meaningful.



### **Advanced data analytics techniques**

In addition to the descriptive analysis presented in this report, we plan to produce a series of topic-based research briefs, by using advanced modelling techniques to investigate potential relationships across various domains and allow longitudinal analysis. There are also opportunities to confirm the structure of each scale and their variables in the redesigned survey. Previous research outputs using structural equation modelling are accessible here: <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/projects/national-survey>

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## 3. He kitenga | Findings

### Te tautoko me ngā rauemi | Support and resourcing

Support and resourcing is one of the larger domains in the principal survey, reflecting a core responsibility principals have as school leaders. The domain includes longstanding national survey questions that track longer-term trends, such as access to external expertise, interactions with the Ministry of Education and other educational agencies, and challenges facing schools. It also features new questions designed to capture changes in educational policy, such as principals' perceptions of the shift from the decile system to the EQI. In response to growing interest in principals' own PLD needs, a new question was developed and included in the 2024 survey. Questions on school property have been updated, along with items asking schools' responses to climate changes.

#### Equity Index

In January 2023, the decile rating system was replaced by the EQI system—a new model for determining the level of additional financial assistance that each school would be eligible for, in addition to their core operational funding. The funding is intended to allow schools to make local decisions about how best to support students who face socioeconomic barriers to achievement. Whereas the decile system was based on a broad estimate of the socioeconomic status of the community in which a school is located, the new EQI uses a finer-grained calculation to both identify need and to allocate funding.<sup>8</sup>

To gauge primary school principals' views on the EQI system and the changes in EQI funding, two questions were added to the 2024 survey.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Principals had mixed views on the EQI system*

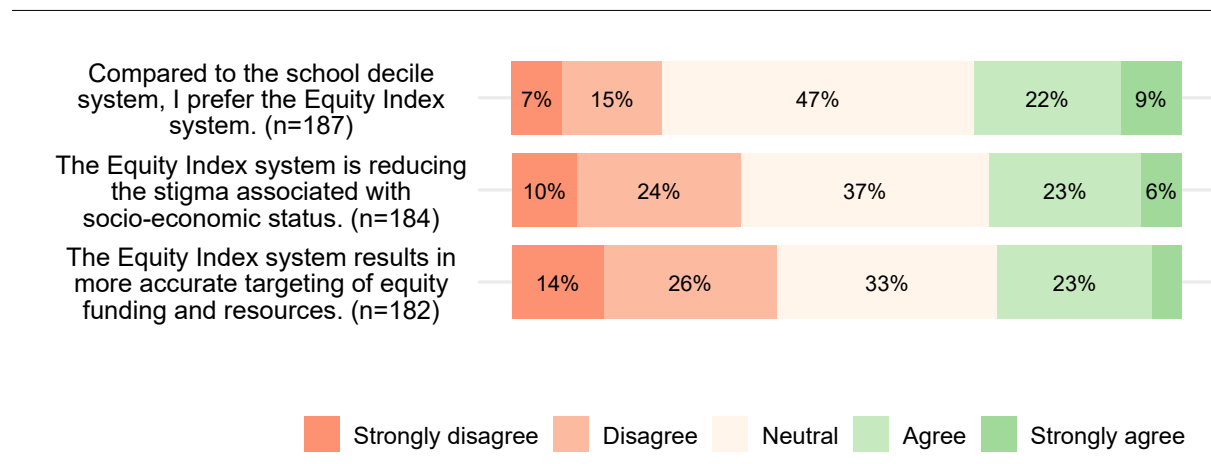
Three Likert-scale items probed principals' perspectives on the EQI system (Figure 3). About one-third (31%) of principal respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, "Compared with the school decile system, I prefer the new Equity Index system", while a relatively large proportion (47%) remained neutral. A similar proportion (29%) of principals strongly agreed or agreed that "The Equity Index system is reducing the stigma associated with socio-economic status". However, fewer principals (27%) felt that the EQI system "results in more accurate targeting of equity funding and resources", with 40% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/changes-in-education/equity-index/>

<sup>9</sup> These questions were first developed and asked in the 2022 National Surveys of Secondary School Principals.

FIGURE 3 Views of the Equity Index system

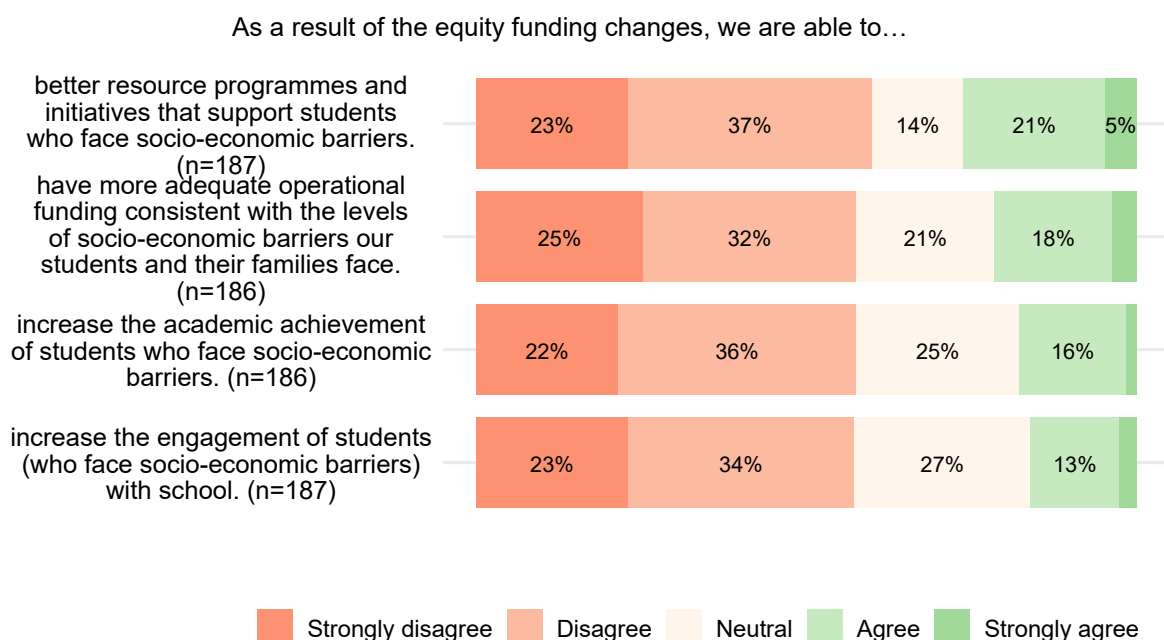


***The majority of principals didn't report benefits from equity funding changes, but principals in schools facing more socioeconomic challenges were more likely to***

Principals were asked whether the EQI funding changes were improving equitable outcomes.<sup>10</sup> As shown in Figure 4 below, the majority of principals (57%–60%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that the equity funding changes allowed them to better resource programmes and initiatives, have more adequate operational funding, or increase engagement or achievement of students who face socioeconomic barriers. In contrast, the agreement rate remained consistently low across all four statements. Just over a quarter (26%) of principals agreed or strongly agreed that, as a result of the equity funding changes, they “are able to better resource programmes and initiatives that support students who face socio-economic barriers”. Just over one-fifth of principals (22%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have “more adequate operational funding consistent with the levels of socio-economic barriers our students and their families face”. Fewer agreed or strongly agreed that the changes have helped them increase the academic achievement (18%) and the engagement (16%) of students facing socioeconomic barriers.

<sup>10</sup> We presented a sample of secondary school principals with the same items in 2022, collecting baseline data about their perceptions of equity funding changes. Secondary school principals in 2022 were more positive about the potential of the funding changes than primary school principals in 2024, 2 years after the change was implemented (see Figure 21 in <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/secondary-principals-perspectives-nzcers-2022-national-survey-schools>).

FIGURE 4 Views of the equity funding changes



Statistically significant relationships were found between school's EQI groups<sup>11</sup> and principals' responses to two items:

- As a result of the equity funding changes, we are able to better resource programmes and initiatives that support students who face socioeconomic barriers.
- As a result of the equity funding changes, we are able to have more adequate operational funding consistent with the levels of socioeconomic barriers our students and their families face.

In general, principals in schools with more socioeconomic challenges were more likely to indicate they could better resource programmes and initiatives as well as have more adequate operational funding. Forty percent of principals in schools with more socioeconomic challenges agreed or strongly agreed that they could better resource programmes and initiatives, and 33% agreed or strongly agreed that they had more adequate operational funding consistent with the levels of socioeconomic barriers their students and their families face. Meanwhile, around one-third of principals in schools with moderate socioeconomic challenges agreed or strongly agreed that that they were able to better resource programmes and initiatives (36%) and that they had more adequate operational funding (30%). In contrast, principals in schools with fewer socioeconomic barriers showed much lower agreement with these statements. A smaller proportion of these principals agreed or strongly agreed that they could better resource programmes and initiatives (10%) and that they had more adequate operational funding (7%). This indicates that schools facing greater socioeconomic challenges are more likely to be seeing some benefits from the equity funding changes, which contributes to understanding whether the EQI system with its more fine-grained calculation than the decile approach is indeed more equitable.

<sup>11</sup> There are three EQI Groups (Fewer, Moderate, and More) as indicated in the diagram from <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data-services/guidelines/school-equity-index-bands-and-groups>

## School property

The management of school property has been a shared responsibility between schools and their boards, and the Ministry of Education. This was the status quo at the time the 2024 survey was conducted. However, in October 2024, following a Ministerial inquiry into school property, the intention for a significant policy response was announced.<sup>12</sup> One of the inquiry's recommendations was the creation of a "new entity ... separate from the Ministry of Education, to assume ownership and asset management responsibility for the school property portfolio" (McCully & Binns, 2024, p. 1), with the establishment of a "Transition Board and Transition Unit" (p. 2) to oversee the establishment of the new school property entity. At the time of writing, an interim chief executive had been appointed but there was little other information available about the new entity.

The 2024 NZCER national survey asked several questions about school buildings. Some of these items were asked in the 2019 survey, and some new items were added to explore specific aspects of physical health and wellbeing associated with the use of learning spaces, such as adequacy of heating, cooling, and ventilation of these spaces.

### ***Three-quarters of schools had sufficient space and buildings in good condition, but nearly half had unmet property needs***

Figures 5 and 6 present principals' perspectives on school buildings and space needs respectively. Of the five items, four were asked in both 2019 and 2024, with one new item introduced: "We have unmet property needs that are having a negative impact on teachers and students".

For the four items asked in both years, there was an increase in principal agreement in 2024:

- In 2024, 78% of principals indicated their school buildings were in good condition, compared with 68% in 2019.
- In 2024, 75% of the principals indicated they had sufficient space for all their classes, compared with 69% in 2019.
- In 2024, 62% of the principals indicated they had sufficient flexibility for their teaching and learning needs, compared with 49% in 2019.
- In 2024, 48% of principals indicated their buildings were energy efficient and had low environmental impact, compared with 22% in 2019.

However, in 2024, nearly half (48%) of principals indicated their school had unmet property needs that were having a negative impact on teachers and students. This item was not asked in 2019, but it will be useful to track these data in the future.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/response-ministerial-inquiry-school-property>

FIGURE 5 Views of school buildings

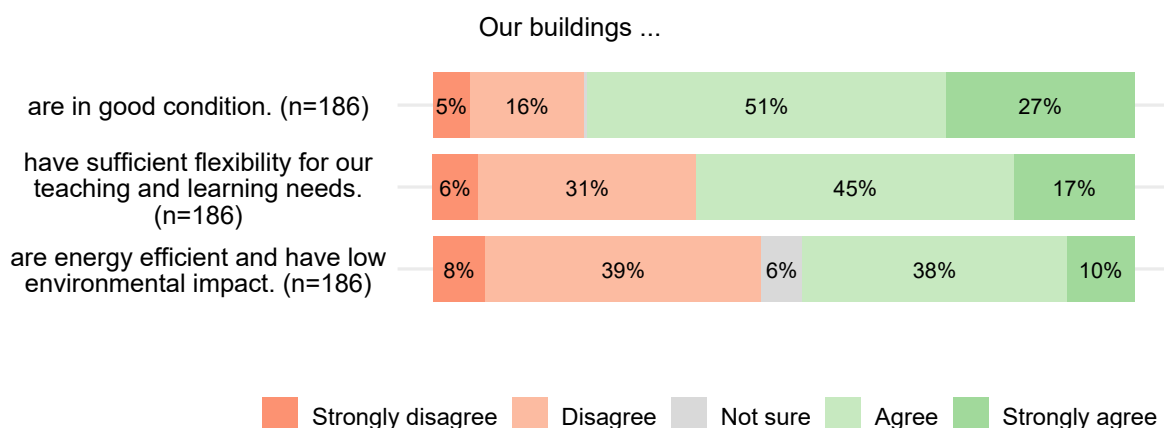
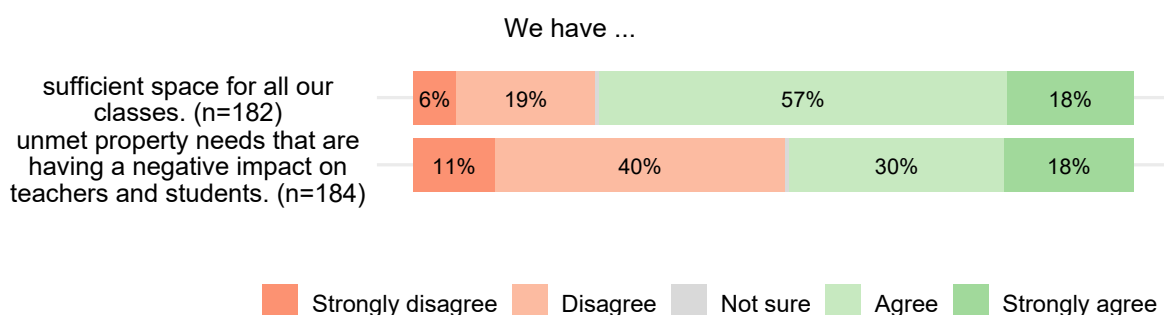


FIGURE 6 Views of space needs

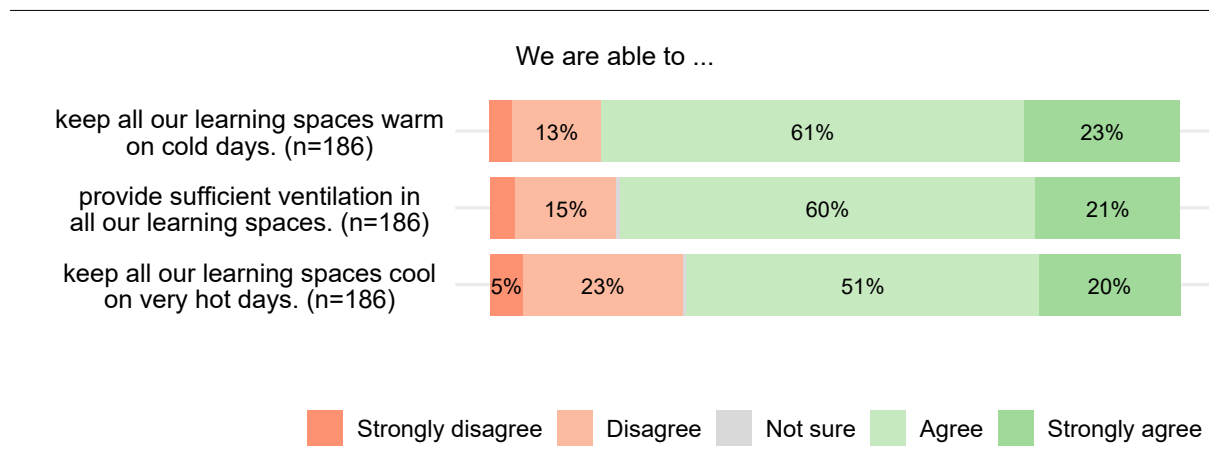


### ***Keeping learning spaces cool on hot days was a challenge for some schools***

In 2024, a new question was added asking principals whether their school faced challenges in maintaining comfortable temperatures in learning spaces, along with an item on ventilation, which was highlighted as an important health issue during the COVID pandemic (Figure 7).

Most principals (71%–84%) indicated agreement that they were able to provide these conditions in all of their learning spaces. However, more than a quarter (28%) of the principals indicated disagreement regarding the statement that “we are able to keep all our learning spaces cool on very hot days” (23% disagreeing and 5% strongly disagreeing), a higher percentage than those who indicated issues with ventilation (19%) or heating (16%) of learning spaces. These findings can be considered in relation to additional questions we asked in 2024 relating to the climate conditions and impacts that schools have been experiencing (see the climate change section later in this domain).

FIGURE 7 Experience related to the use of learning spaces



## Interaction with education agencies and organisations

The national survey has asked primary principals about their schools' interactions with education agencies and organisations for multiple cycles. In the 2024 survey, a new response option, "have not sought advice", was included to better understand whether principals have interactions with different educational organisations.<sup>13</sup> The result shows that the Ministry of Education's national office (26%) and the Teaching Council (22%) have the highest proportion of principals not seeking advice from them, while the Ministry of Education's regional offices (4%) and Te Whakarōputanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa (formerly NZSTA, 7%) have the lowest. Additionally, 16% of principals reported not seeking advice from the New Zealand Principals' Federation, 15% from NZEI Te Riu Roa, and 14% from ERO.

### *Principals were largely positive about the advice and support they received from education agencies and organisations*

Similar to the picture in 2019, positive views outweighed negative views for all the organisations in 2024 (Figure 8). However, due to the introduction of the "have not sought advice" option, caution is needed when interpreting the comparisons of the results across years. The 2024 results presented below are based on respondents who had sought advice or support from each organisation or agency, whereas the 2019 data included all respondents to the question (regardless of whether they had interactions with them).

Most (88%) of principals indicated that they had helpful advice and support from Te Whakarōputanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa (formerly NZSTA), up from 72% in 2019 when NZSTA also received the highest level of agreement. Most principals were also positive about their interactions with Ministry of Education regional offices: 79% indicated they had helpful advice and support from their regional office in 2024, up from 69% in 2019. In addition, 76% of principals reported receiving helpful advice and support from the Principals' Federation in 2024, up from 65% in 2019.

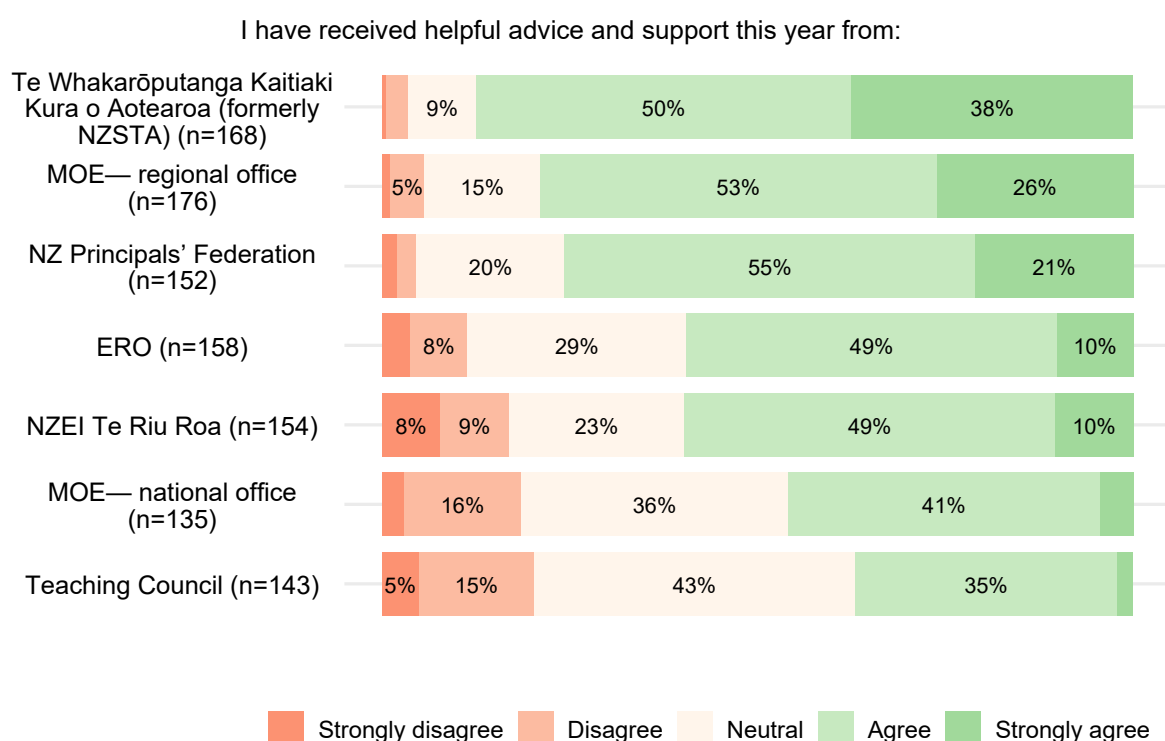
The 2024 data show a more positive perception of the helpfulness of advice and support from ERO compared with previous cycles of the survey. Over half (59%) of principals agreed that ERO had provided them with helpful advice, compared with 32% in 2019, and 43% in 2016.

<sup>13</sup> In previous cycles, we reported this result based on the proportion of respondents who did not respond for each agency or organisation instead.

Over half of principals reported receiving useful advice and support from NZEI Te Riu Roa (59%, same as 59% in 2019). Compared with 2019, a larger proportion of principals (45%, up from 30% in 2019) reported receiving helpful advice and support from the Ministry of Education national office in 2024. The lowest proportion of principals (37%) reported receiving helpful advice and support from the Teaching Council, although a further 43% gave a neutral response.

We included an option in the 2024 survey for principals to add any other organisations they had received helpful advice and support from, and 19 principals did so. The most common organisations mentioned were principal networks or groups, including local networks of principals, Kāhui Ako, Te Akatea (NZ Māori Principals), Tautai o le Moana (New Zealand Pasifika Principals' Association), the newly established principals' union (Primary Principals' Collective Bargaining), and the NZ Catholic Primary Principals' Association.

FIGURE 8 Interaction with education agencies and organisations



## Accessing external expertise and PLD

As in previous cycles, we asked principals about their access to external expertise to support their schools' work. This year, a new question about principals' own PLD needs was introduced.

### ***Principals identified a growing need for external expertise in mental health, trauma, and differentiated teaching, but had limited access support***

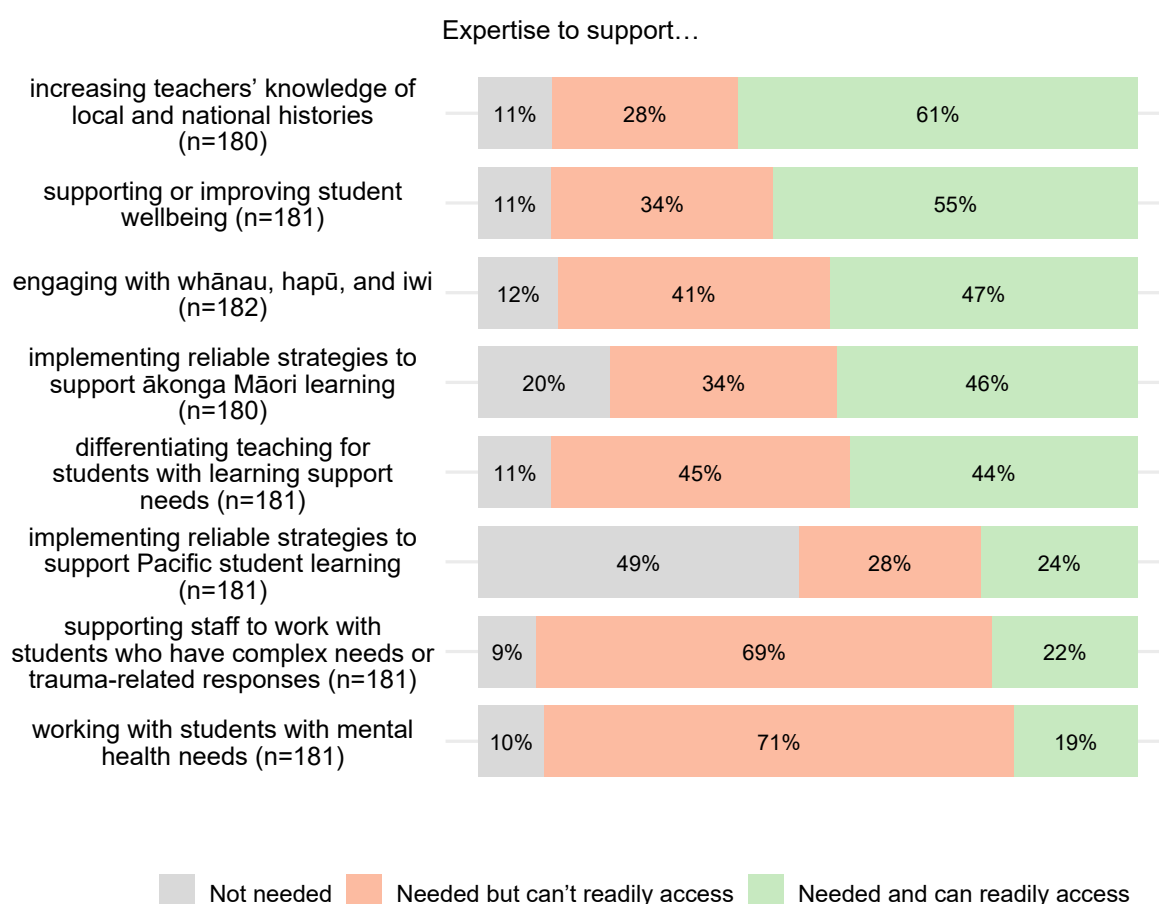
Figure 9 shows an overview of whether external expertise is considered “not needed”, “needed and can readily access”, and “needed, but can’t readily access”. Table 1 compares principals' view on the expertise that is “needed, but can’t readily access”, based on results from 2016, 2019, and 2024.



Overall, principals reported a high need for external expertise in various areas, with only 9%–20% rating most items as “not needed”, except for “implementing reliable strategies to support Pacific student learning”, which 49% of principals considered “not needed”.

Regarding accessibility, over half of the principals indicated that expertise in increasing teachers’ knowledge of local and national histories (61%) and supporting or improving student wellbeing (55%) was “needed and can readily access”.

FIGURE 9 Access to and needs for external expertise



As shown in Table 1 below, the top three areas where principals identified a need for expertise but could not readily access it are:

- working with students with mental health needs (71%, a continued increase from 46% in 2016 and 59% in 2019)
- supporting staff to work with students who have complex needs or trauma-related responses (69%, a new item in 2024)
- differentiating teaching for students with learning support needs (45%, a continued increase from 24% in 2016 and 30% in 2019).

Additionally, there has been a noticeable rise in the proportion of principals reporting that supporting or improving student wellbeing is “needed but not readily accessible”, increasing from 14% in 2016, 19% in 2019, to 34% in 2024.

TABLE 1 External expertise needed but not readily accessed by schools

Aspect	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n=180–182)
Working with students with mental health needs	46%	59%	71%
Supporting staff to work with students who have complex needs or trauma-related responses	*	*	69%
Differentiating teaching for students with learning support needs <sup>14</sup>	24%	30%	45%
Engaging with whānau, hapū, and iwi	*	46%	41%
Implementing reliable strategies to support ākonga Māori learning	37%	41%	34%
Supporting or improving student wellbeing	14%	19%	34%
Implementing reliable strategies to support Pacific student learning	21%	29%	28%
Increasing teachers' knowledge of local and national histories	*	*	28%

\* = Not asked.

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

### ***Around half of principals wanted PLD in AI and working with local hapū/iwi***

A new question in the survey asked about principals' own PLD needs for the future (Figure 10). Our engagement with stakeholder organisations during survey development identified this as a gap in the evidence base.

Over half (56%) of principals identified a need for PLD in AI in education, followed by 50% indicating a desire to improve their skills in working with local hapū and/or iwi. Around one-third of principals expressed a need for development in leading engagement with parents, whānau, and communities (36%), mental health and wellbeing (32%), and developing curriculum that reflects local context (31%). The remaining areas, including “giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi”, “making evidence-based decisions”, “leading for equity”, “analysing assessment data”, “inclusive education and diversity”, and “strategic planning and implementation”, were selected by 20%–29% of principals.

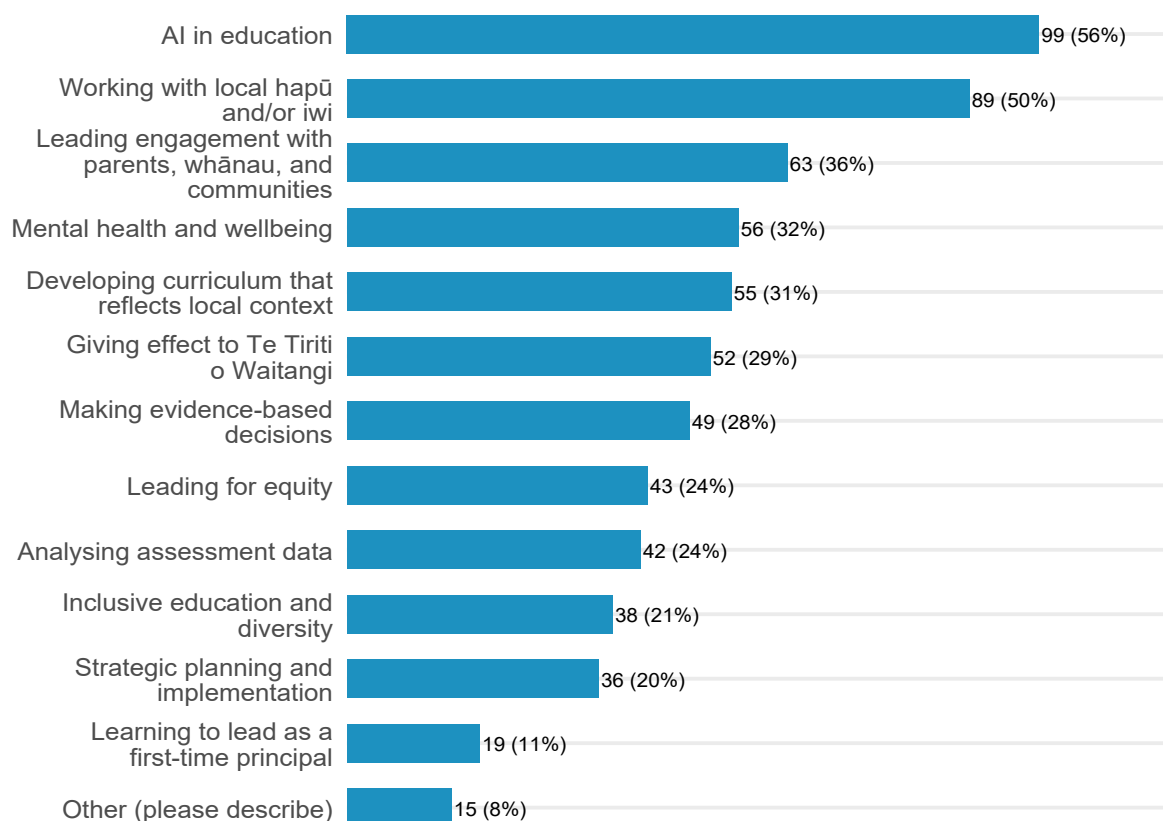
A statistically significant relationship was found between principals' years of experience and their choice of “strategic planning and implementation”, with 61% of those identifying this as a PLD need being principals with no more than 5 years of experience.

It is unsurprising that only 11% of principals selected “learning to lead as a first-time principal” as their PLD needs, given that only 20% of survey respondents had been a principal for fewer than 3 years. A statistically significant relationship was found between this PLD need and principals' years of experience. All 19 respondents who selected this item had no more than 5 years of experience, including 16 with less than 3 years and three with 3–5 years as a principal. Of note is that a statistically significant relationship was found between principals' PLD needs in this area with their school's EQI groups. Principals in schools facing more socioeconomic challenges were more likely to select this option (27%), compared with just 6% in schools with moderate and fewer socioeconomic barriers. This suggests a greater need for PLD for first-time principals in schools with higher socioeconomic challenges.

14 This item read “Differentiating teaching for students with disabilities or learning support needs” in 2016 and 2019.

In addition, 15 principals selected the “other” option for this question, giving more specific needs such as “Te reo Māori”, “supporting staff education and expectations”, “assessments that are practical for Year 3 students”, and “leadership from a Māori perspective”. Some comments also highlighted the need for increased funding and resources.

**FIGURE 10 Professional development areas that principals would like for themselves in the future (n = 177)**



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

## Issues facing your school

We asked principals to identify the major issues facing their schools from a list of items, many of which have been included in national surveys since 2010. Table 2 illustrates trends in the major issues identified by principals, by comparing the results of 2016, 2019, and 2024.

### ***Fewer principals reported major issues facing their schools, although the challenges in supporting students with diverse needs remained***

Overall, compared with 2019, there was a general decrease in the proportion of principals selecting most issues, including funding, staffing levels, PLD, and property. The exception is “support for students with mental health or additional wellbeing needs”, which remains an ongoing concern. For all other issues asked in previous years, the proportion of principals selecting them has decreased by 5% to 28%.

In 2024, the top two issues facing schools are challenges related to supporting students with “complex learning, and social and emotional needs” (82%, new item in 2024) and “mental health or additional wellbeing needs” (65%, similar as 63% in 2019).

Around half of principals selected challenges in “cost of purchasing, maintaining, and replacing digital devices and infrastructure” (50%, down from 64% in 2019), “too much being asked of schools” (49%, down from 72% in 2019), “funding” (47%, down from 67% in 2019), and “recruiting quality teachers” (45%, down from 56% in 2019), all of which were also prominent concerns in the 2019 survey.

Given that “too much being asked of schools” was identified by most principals in 2019, we invited principals who selected this option in the 2024 survey to provide further elaborations. The most common theme in their responses was the concern over “too many changes expected of us in short time frames”, particularly regarding curriculum change and implementation, which was frequently mentioned. Several principals expressed concerns about the increasing workload related to these rapid changes. For example:

Too much is expected of my leadership and my teachers. It's hard to reduce this workload with consistent, rapid change.

The feedback received in “other” option (13%, n = 23) reiterated several pressing challenges faced by the schools, mainly centred around insufficient funding, rapid changes in curriculum, and inadequate support for both students and staff.

A statistically significant relationship was found between schools' EQI groups and schools' challenges with “recruiting quality teachers” and “improving student attendance”. Among schools with more socioeconomic barriers, 77% reported facing challenges in “recruiting quality teachers”, compared with 37% of principals in schools with moderate socioeconomic barriers, and 33% of principals in schools with fewer barriers. Similarly, 60% of principals in schools with more socioeconomic barriers said “improving student attendance” was a major issue facing their schools, compared with 31% of principals in schools with moderate socioeconomic barriers, and 20% of principals in schools with fewer socioeconomic barriers.

TABLE 2 Major issues facing principals' schools

Major issue	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n = 175)
Support for students with complex learning, and social and emotional needs	*	*	82%
Support for students with mental health or additional wellbeing needs	*	63%	65%
Cost of purchasing, maintaining, and replacing digital devices and infrastructure <sup>15</sup>	(52%)	64%	50%
Too much being asked of schools (please describe) <sup>16</sup>	53%	72%	49%
Funding	48%	67%	47%
Recruiting quality teachers <sup>17</sup>	(31%)	56%	45%
Partnerships with hapū and/or iwi	30%	46%	41%
Improving student attendance	*	*	34%
Staffing levels/class sizes	38%	53%	34%
Property maintenance or development	48%	55%	27%
Good quality professional learning and development	30%	37%	14%

\* = Not asked.

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

## Responding to climate change

International research highlights the impact of climate stressors on children's development and educational outcomes (Prentice et al., 2024). The national survey introduced questions about climate change and sustainability for the first time in 2019 (Bolstad, 2020). In 2024, several new questions were introduced to explore climate-related impacts on schools and their communities, along with carbon footprints and emissions reduction efforts as proactive responses to sustainability challenges.

### *Flood impacts had affected 41% of schools across most regions*

Regional storm and flooding events have significantly impacted schools and communities in recent years, with some regions impacted multiple times. In early 2023, over 500 North Island schools were impacted by a storm and cyclone.<sup>18</sup> Other notable flooding and storm events in the past 5 years include Napier in November 2020, Canterbury in May/June 2021, Westport and Buller in July 2021, Auckland in February 2022 (Cyclone Dovi), Nelson and Marlborough in August 2022, and Auckland, Coromandel, and the East Coast in 2023 (Cyclone Hale).

<sup>15</sup> In 2016, the equivalent item was "maintenance/replacement of digital technology", identified by 52% of principals as a major issue for their school.

<sup>16</sup> This item read "too much is being asked of schools" without comment box in previous years.

<sup>17</sup> In the 2016 national survey, we amalgamated items about teacher supply, and asked about "attracting or recruiting good teachers": 31% of principals identified this as a major issue for their school.

<sup>18</sup> See <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/govt-repair-or-rebuild-all-weather-hit-schools>

A desk-based assessment by the Ministry of Education in 2024 identified that 1,102 schools and kura (around 44% of all schools and kura) are potentially at some risk of coastal, surface, and river flooding,<sup>19</sup> ranging from relatively low impact (e.g., flooding of carpark or fields) to more serious (more than 50% of buildings affected). Additionally, a 2024 assessment<sup>20</sup> prepared for the Climate Change Commission identified 106 primary schools at risk of coastal flooding or landslides due to a 20 cm sea-level rise, a scenario that could occur within decades (Urban Intelligence, 2024).

As Table 3<sup>21</sup> shows, just under a third of principals indicated that their school had experienced flooding that impacted the homes of families and/or staff (32%), and flooding that impacted on school property or staff/student ability to access school (31%).

**TABLE 3 Schools' experiences of flooding and hot days in the past 5 years (n = 176)**

Type of impact	N	%
Flooding that impacted the homes of families and/or staff	57	32
Flooding that impacted school property and/or impacted staff or students' school access (e.g., roads, bridges)	54	31
Excessively hot days (e.g., students are unable to concentrate in class due to heat, or need to limit physical activities outside)	33	19

While extreme heat has been a less common experience in New Zealand, there are still important reasons to consider the risks and impacts of hot days for learning and health.<sup>22</sup> Fewer principals (19%) indicated their school had experienced excessively hot days than flooding. Of these principals, 36% also indicated that their school had challenges keeping learning spaces cool on hot days (the item reported earlier in the school property section).

A statistically significant relationship was found between schools' regions and the flood impact. Overall, 73 principals (41%) reported either one or both categories of flood impact described in Table 3 above. These schools were located across 15 of New Zealand's 16 local government regions (Table 4). Of the 73 schools, 40% were in Auckland and 8% were in Hawke's Bay. The 33 principals who said their school had experienced excessively hot days came from 11 regions, with 23 of these principals also reporting one or both categories of flood impact.

<sup>19</sup> This information was previously published on the Ministry of Education website in the National Flood Risk Management Programme section. This programme has since been inactivated and the information can no longer be found on the Ministry's website.

<sup>20</sup> This assessment did not include inland (i.e., non-coastal) fluvial or pluvial flood risks.

<sup>21</sup> Eighty-three principals responded to the question about experiences of flooding and/or hot days; 93 skipped the question, presumably because none of the options applied to them.

<sup>22</sup> For example, recent New Zealand research has identified links between daily temperatures and hospital admissions in young children, including ethnic, sex, and socioeconomic differences in vulnerabilities to these risks (Lai et al., 2024).

TABLE 4 Schools affected by flood or hot days in the past 5 years by local government region

Local government region	Flood impacts (n = 73)		Hot days (n = 33)		Both flood impacts and hot days (n = 23)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Auckland	29	40	8	24	7	30
Hawke's Bay	6	8	1	3	1	4
Wellington	5	7	3	9	1	4
Waikato	5	7	3	9	1	4
Otago	5	7	5	15	2	9
Northland	4	5	3	9	2	9
Tasman	4	5	3	9	3	13
Canterbury	3	4	3	9	3	13
Manawatū-Whanganui	3	4	1	3	1	4
Southland	2	3	1	3	1	4
Gisborne	2	3	-	-	-	-
Marlborough	2	3	-	-	-	-
Taranaki	1	1	2	6	1	4
Nelson	1	1	-	-	-	-
West Coast	1	1	-	-	-	-
Bay of Plenty	-	-	-	-	-	-

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

### ***Few schools had information about their school's carbon footprint***

Carbon footprint measurements help identify activities that produce greenhouse gas (GhG) emissions and ways to reduce them. However, measuring a school's carbon footprint can require technical expertise and data that are not routinely gathered, and some schools pay for expert organisations to measure and/or verify their carbon footprints.<sup>23</sup> In 2023, as part of the Carbon Neutral Government Programme, the Ministry of Education produced the first emissions inventory for the whole sector based on centrally available data, estimating a total of over 1.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>e) were emitted by the education sector as a whole in the year ending June 2023. From 2024, it has been possible for schools to request a copy of their school's carbon footprint.<sup>24</sup>

Another new question was introduced in the 2024 survey asking whether the principals have information about their school's carbon footprint. Just 16% of principals had this information, either by measuring this themselves (6%) or by requesting this from the Ministry of Education (10%). Most (84%) said they did not have information about their school's carbon footprint (Table 5).

<sup>23</sup> A pilot study by Auckland Council explored opportunities to empower students and teachers to learn how to "do it themselves" with targeted support. An evaluation found that, while it was possible to do, it was not necessarily easy or achievable for all schools without adequate support (Bolstad, 2021).

<sup>24</sup> This footprint was generated based on the Ministry of Education's modelling.

TABLE 5 Information about school's carbon footprint (n = 176)

Information about school's carbon footprint	N	%
Yes, we have requested and been provided with this information from the Ministry of Education.	18	10
Yes, we have measured it ourselves (alone, or with support from an expert).	11	6
No, we do not have this information.	147	84

### ***Some schools were taking sustainability and climate action***

The Ministry's inventory identifies that the highest-emitting activities for the sector on an annual basis are purchased goods and services, transport, and construction.<sup>25</sup> While there is currently no overarching sustainability strategy for the state-funded schools, the Ministry has some programmes and initiatives relating to emissions reduction, such as the coal boiler replacement programme and opportunities to reduce emissions through capital works (Beca Ltd, 2024). In 2024, the Ministry highlighted school transport as a key area with potential for emissions reduction, suggesting that national reductions of 77,620 tCO<sub>2</sub>e could be achieved if half the students living in urban centres got to school via active transport.

In the 2024 survey, principals rated their agreement with a series of statements about sustainability and responding to climate change. While similar questions were asked in 2019, most items were re-worded in 2024, and a 5-point scale with a new "neutral" middle option was used instead of the previous 4-point scale. As a result, comparability between the 2019 and 2024 surveys is limited and therefore not included in this report.

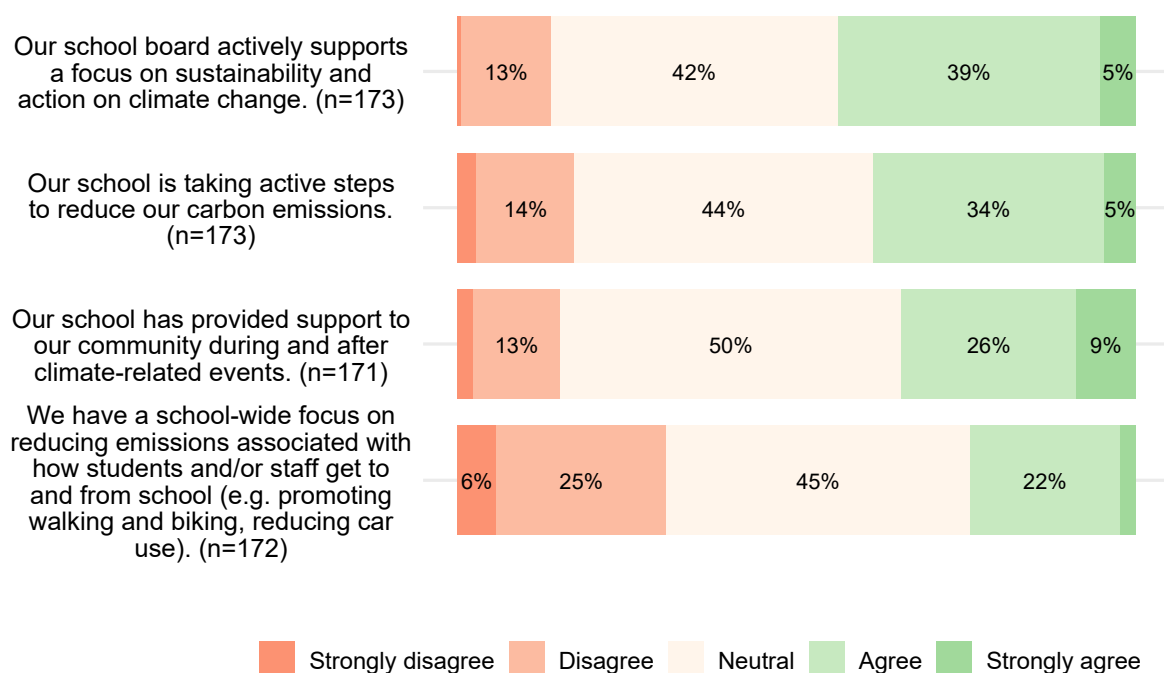
As shown in Figure 11, 44% of principals indicated some level of agreement that their "school board actively supports a focus on sustainability and action on climate change", with 42% selecting the "neutral" response. Fewer principals indicated agreement that their school is taking active steps to reduce their carbon emissions (39%), has provided support to its community during and after climate-related events (35%), or that there is a school-wide focus on reducing emissions associated with how students and/or staff get to and from school (24%). Most principals who indicated agreement did not select "strongly agree".

The item with the highest level of "strongly agree" (9%) was that their school has provided support to its community during and after climate-related events, with over a third of principals (35%) agreeing or strongly agreeing with this item. Of the schools whose principals reported the school having been impacted by floods, 66% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

<sup>25</sup> Other emissions sources include heating, electricity, water, and waste.



FIGURE 11 Responding to climate change



Statistically significant relationships were found between schools' characteristics and principals' responses to this question:

- Principals from contributing schools and larger schools were more likely to respond positively to the statement, "we have a school-wide focus on reducing emissions associated with how students and/or staff get to and from school (e.g., promoting walking and biking, reducing car use)".
- All respondents from schools in the Hawke's Bay, Marlborough, and Nelson regions agreed or strongly agreed that "our school has provided support to our community during and after climate-related events". Just over a third (37%) of the responses indicating agreement or strong agreement for this statement came from the Auckland region.
- Principals in schools with fewer socioeconomic challenges were more likely to indicate that their "school is taking active steps to reduce our carbon emissions (50% of principals in these lower EQI schools agreed or strongly agreed). Agreement dropped to 28% for principals in schools with moderate socioeconomic barriers, and 38% for principals in schools with more socioeconomic barriers. Principals in schools with more socioeconomic barriers were also most likely to disagree or strongly disagree that the school was taking active steps to reduce carbon emissions (31%, compared with 14% in schools with fewer socioeconomic barriers and 11% in schools with moderate socioeconomic barriers).

He hononga pāhekoheko | Collaborative relationships

The collaborative relationships domain asked principals about their relationships with others in the wider education system, including other schools, early learning services, local hapū and iwi, and Pacific families and community leaders. All of these have been the focus of questions in previous cycles of the national survey, although questions were updated for the current context. This year we did not ask a specific question about Kāhui Ako, and we added a question about how schools work collaboratively with their communities around improving student attendance. This section begins with a question about school culture and ways of working.

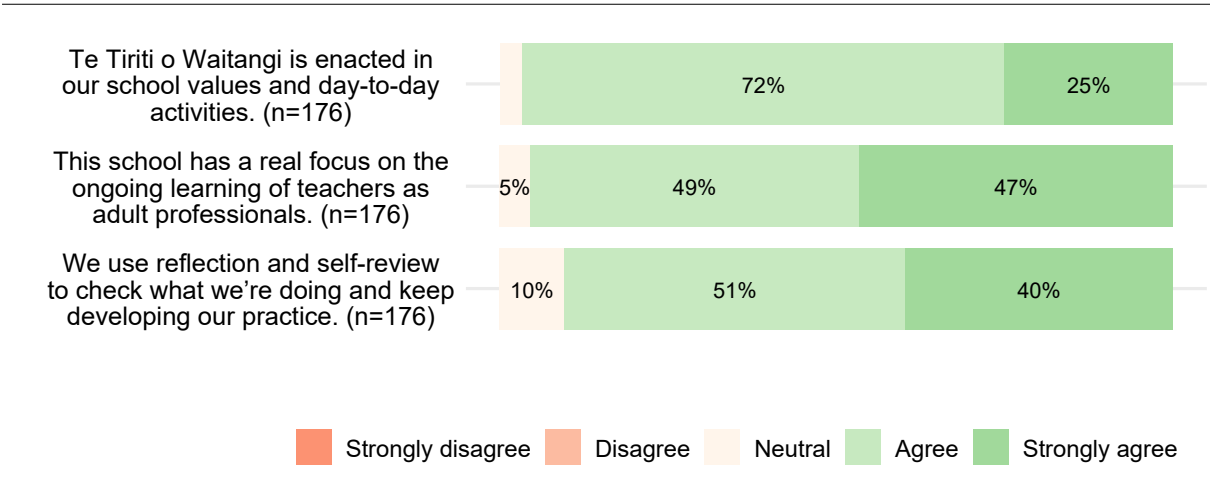
School culture and ways of working

We combined three new items in a question about school culture and ways of working: enactment of Te Tiriti o Waitangi; ongoing learning of teachers; and use of reflection and self-review. All three had a very high level of agreement from principals, with no disagreement. Note that this survey was completed by principals when Te Tiriti o Waitangi was very visible in media, with the introduction of the Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi Bill (introduced on 7 November 2024). There was much public interest, with the nationwide hīkoi against the Bill taking place in October and November.

Nearly all principals indicated that, in their schools, Te Tiriti o Waitangi was valued and that ongoing teacher learning and self-reflection were practised

Nearly all (97%) of principals agreed that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is enacted in their school values and day-to-day activities, with 72% agreeing and one-quarter strongly agreeing (Figure 12). The quantitative nature of the survey means we do not have information from principals about *how* Te Tiriti is enacted, and what this looks like in their school. However, responses to the open-ended question, “What is the most effective thing your school has done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori” (see “Improving equity” section under the Inclusion domain) give us some insight. Over half of respondents highlighted school community and culture, including the embedding of tikanga, te reo, and te ao Māori values and worldviews into daily, schoolwide practices. Principals reported introducing whānau and whanaungatanga groups, kapa haka, and daily tikanga-based routines, such as karakia and mihi whakatau, to reinforce cultural belonging. Increased visibility of te reo Māori through signage and normalising its use in classrooms were also key initiatives.

FIGURE 12 Views of school’s culture and ways of working



Nearly all principals also agreed that their school focuses on the ongoing learning of teachers as adult professionals (96%), and that they use self-review to check what they're doing and develop their practice (91%).

The high level of agreement reported shows the strong commitment principals have to these three aspects of school culture and ways of working. The responsibility that principals as school leaders have for these aspects of school culture may introduce a positivity bias (a tendency to be more positive) that contributes to the high ratings. To mitigate this, we also included two of these items in the teacher survey. Although teachers' agreement rate with these statements is lower than the principals', the picture was still very positive. Most teachers agreed that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is enacted in their school values and day-to-day activities (85% agreed or strongly agreed, 11% neutral, 3% disagreed or strongly disagreed), and that the school has a real focus on the ongoing learning of teachers as adult professionals (80% agreed or strongly agreed, 15% neutral, 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed).

## **Working collaboratively with other schools**

### ***Nearly all schools worked with other schools in at least some way***

As in previous cycles, we asked principals about their joint work with other schools, including belonging to a Kāhui Ako,<sup>26</sup> professional learning, sporting and cultural events, and sharing student data (Table 6).

The overall picture remains very similar to 2019. The top three ways that principals report working with other schools have remained the same since 2019: sharing sporting events (93%, similar as 92% in 2019); sharing individual student information if they move to another school (81%, similar as 82% in 2019); and sharing and reflecting on leadership practice at the principal level (81%, the same as 2019). Most of the principals responding all belonged to a Kāhui Ako (82%), an increase from 74% in 2019. The proportion of principals reporting the sharing of cultural events with other schools has also increased, from 68% in 2019 to 74% in 2024.

However, the proportion of principals reporting sharing and discussing each school's student achievement data has decreased, from 43% in 2019 to 38% in 2024. Interestingly, fewer principals report sharing PLD with other schools (69%, down from 77% in 2019), but more report sharing challenges and approaches to curriculum and pedagogy (64%, up from 51%). This may reflect that the survey was completed in Term 4, 2024 when changes to curriculum and pedagogy, particularly for literacy and maths, were being introduced.

A new item this year asked principals whether they worked with other schools to support continuity in Māori language learning. Just over a third (35%) said they did. This is a higher proportion than the 19% of schools that offer bilingual or immersion opportunities (Level 1 and 2; see Teaching and learning domain).

A small proportion of principals (10%, n = 17) left a comment indicating other ways they worked jointly with other schools, most commonly belonging to clusters that are not Kāhui Ako (e.g., predate the initiative). Two said they worked with intermediate schools to support transition.

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26 In 2019, Kāhui Ako involvement was not included in this list as the survey asked a separate set of questions about Kāhui Ako.

TABLE 6 Joint work with other schools

	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n = 176)
Share sporting events	98%	92%	93%
Belong to a Kāhui Ako <sup>27</sup>	*	(74%)	(82%)
Share individual student information if they move to another school	*	82%	81%
Share and reflect on leadership practice at the principal level	80%	81%	81%
Share cultural events	79%	68%	74%
Visit other schools to learn from each other	76%	75%	74%
Share PLD	73%	77%	69%
Share challenges and approaches to curriculum and pedagogy <sup>28</sup>	49%	51%	64%
Work with secondary schools to support transition	*	*	62%
Share and discuss each school's student achievement data <sup>29</sup>	41%	43%	38%
Support continuity in Māori language learning	*	*	35%

\* = Not asked.

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

## Working collaboratively with Early Learning Services (ELS)

This year, we revised the question asking principals about their schools' engagement with ELS to support the transition of new entrants to school. This provides more fine-grained information on the type of engagement.

### ***Most principals actively engaged with ELS to support children's transitions to school, with a strong focus on meetings, visits, and information sharing***

Most principals (80%) reported attending formal meetings to discuss the transition of children with learning and/or behavioural needs (Figure 13). This was followed by hosting ELS visits for children about to transition to school (78%) and visiting ELS to build relationships with children, parents, whānau, and ELS teachers (70%). Over half (60%) of principals indicated that ELS shared written and/or verbal information with them about individual children transitioning to their schools, while below half (48%) attended joint community events to build relationships. Under one-fifth of principals (19%) felt that their schools received children from too many ELS to effectively work with each service to ensure a good transition for all children.

A few principals (10%, n = 17) left comments indicating other engagement that schools had with the ELS, including inviting "our local ELS to school community events" or "to Kāhui Ako meetings", hosting "children/parent visits for transition to school in a regular weekly programme", and "art/sport opportunities".

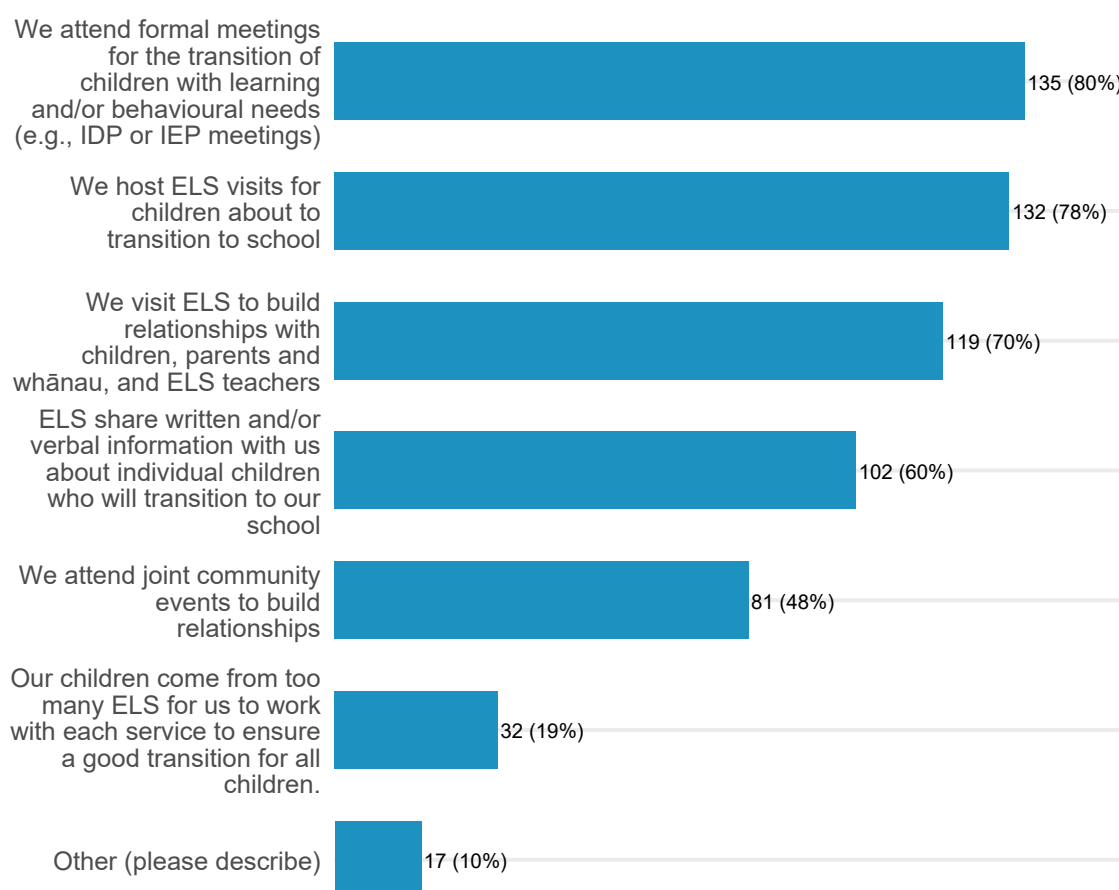
27 A separate question "Does your school belong to a Kāhui Ako?" was asked in 2019.

28 This item read "Share challenges and approaches around getting change in pedagogy" in 2016 and 2019.

29 This item read "Discuss school achievement data" in 2016.

Unsurprisingly, this question was statistically significantly related to respondents' school type<sup>30</sup> and size. Compared with respondents from larger or smaller schools, respondents from schools with a roll of 101–300 were more likely to select “we visit ELS to build relationships with children, parents and whānau, and ELS teachers” and less likely to select “our children come from too many ELS for us to work with each service to ensure a good transition for all children”.

**FIGURE 13 Ways that schools engage with Early Learning Services (ELS) to support new entrant transitions to school (n = 169)**



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

### Working collaboratively with local hapū and/or iwi

Schools have been increasingly encouraged to work with local hapū and/or iwi in partnership, so that ākonga Māori can experience belonging and success as Māori, and that all the students in a school understand and respect the culture, knowledge, and language of their local hapū and iwi. In 2019, we questioned principals about their interactions with local iwi, with only one item enquiring into their interactions with local hapū. In this cycle, we included local hapū and/or iwi in all questions and have added new items to gain a better understanding of schools' interactions with local hapū and/or iwi.

<sup>30</sup> Contributing schools and full primary schools were more likely to select some items than intermediate schools, given the nature of those school types.

### ***Schools had increased interactions with local hapū and iwi***

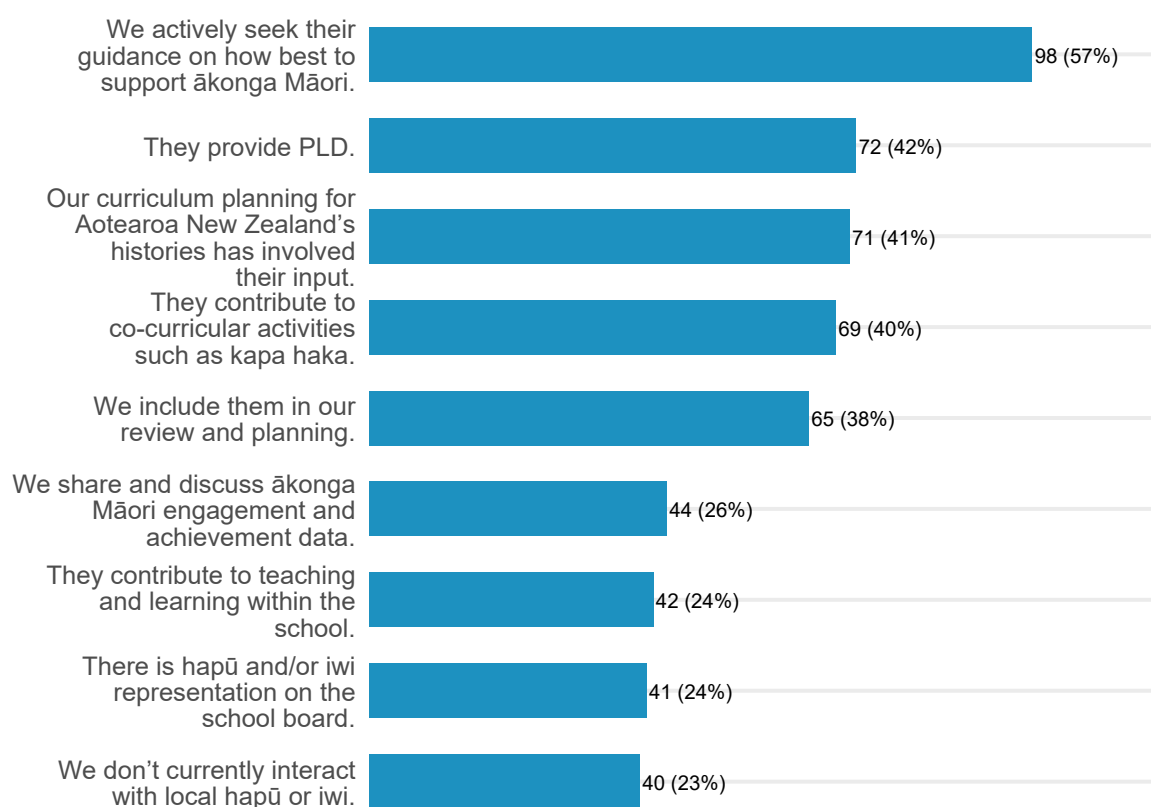
Schools' interactions with local hapū and iwi are increasing (Figure 14). In 2019, 60% of principals had interacted with their local hapū and/or iwi. This had increased to 77% in 2024, as only 23% of principals indicated they don't currently interact with local hapū or iwi.

Over half (57%) of the principals indicated that they actively seek guidance from local hapū and/or iwi on how best to support ākonga Māori, making it the most selected interaction from the list.

It is possible that the new history curriculum influenced an increase of interactions between principals and local hapū and/or iwi, as 41% of principals in 2024 had involved local hapū and/or iwi in curriculum planning for Aotearoa New Zealand's histories. Similarly, 40% of principals said the local hapū and/or iwi contributed to co-curricular activities such as kapa haka and 38% said they included hapū and/or iwi in their review and planning. A similar proportion (42%) said local hapū and/or iwi had provided PLD. This may have been to support the Aotearoa New Zealand Histories curriculum.

Around one-quarter (26%) of the principals in 2024 had shared and discussed ākonga Māori engagement and achievement data with hapū and/or iwi and had hapū and/or iwi contribute to teaching and learning (24%) as well as representation on the school board (24%).

**FIGURE 14 Schools' interactions with local hapū and/or iwi (n = 172)**



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

## Working collaboratively with Pacific families and communities

In this section, we report on primary schools' interactions with Pacific families and/or community leaders. This question was expanded for the 2024 survey to provide a more comprehensive picture of schools' interactions with Pacific families and communities, in line with our focus on Pacific education, and our desire to use the survey to understand to what extent and in what ways the system is serving Pacific students (see Section 4 He matapaki | Discussion).

### *There was a potential for schools to work more with their Pacific families and communities*

To better understand how schools engage with Pacific families and communities, we introduced two response options to this question: 1) "We don't currently interact with Pacific families or community leaders", and 2) "We don't currently have Pacific students".<sup>31</sup> Principals from 80% of schools in our survey have Pacific students (20%, n = 34 said they did not). Of those 132 schools with Pacific students, 61% are currently interacting with their Pacific families and communities in at least one way, and 39% reported no interactions, despite having Pacific students.

Figure 15 shows that the most commonly reported interactions with Pacific families and/or community leaders were schools seeking guidance on how best to support Pacific students (30% of principals), followed by contributing to co-curricular activities such as cultural groups (27% of principals). Around one-fifth of principals reported including strategies for engaging with Pacific families in their strategic plan (22%), sharing and discussing Pacific student engagement and achievement data<sup>32</sup> (20%), and having Pacific representation on the board (19%).

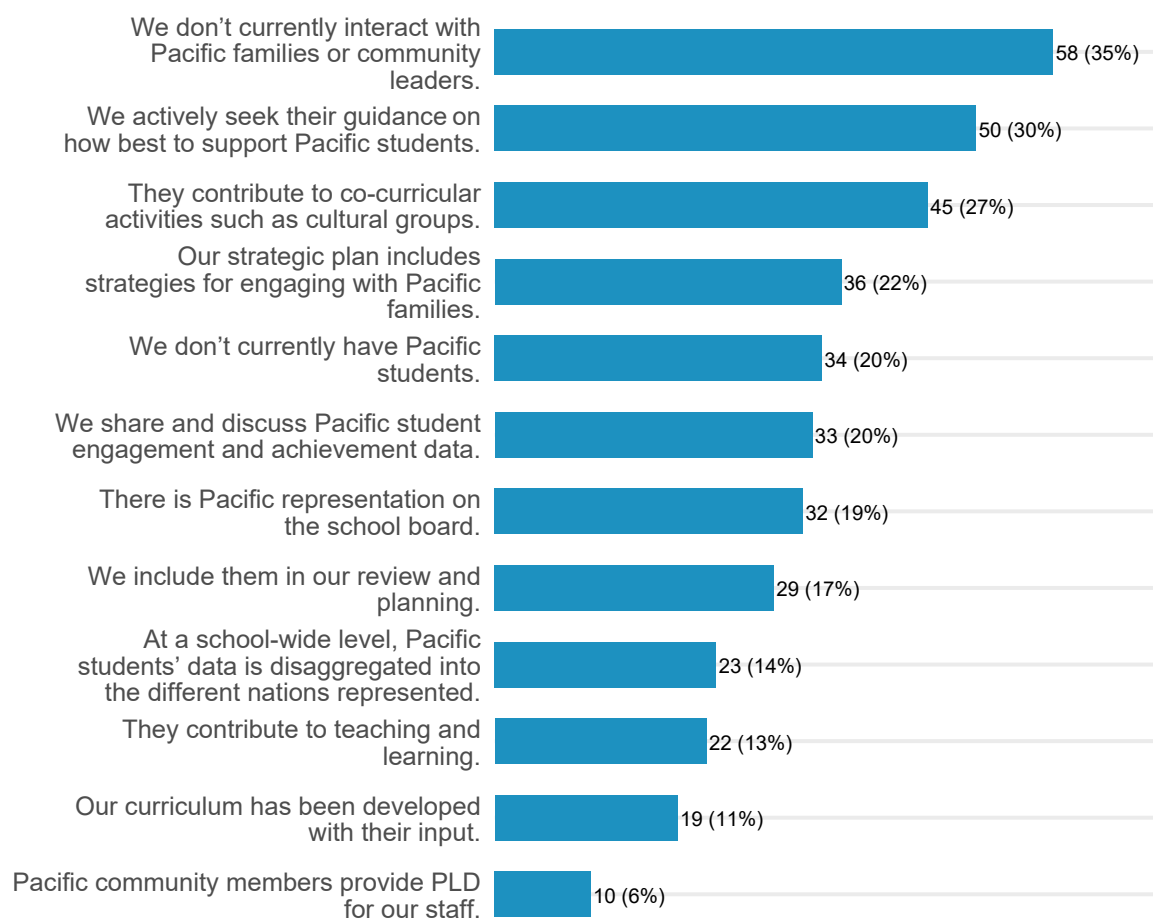
We can compare data with the 2019 survey for two items: 1) the involvement of Pacific families and/or community leaders in strategic planning, and 2) the disaggregation of Pacific students' data. In 2019, 36% of principals either strongly agreed or agreed that their school strategic plan included strategies for engaging with Pacific families. In 2024, just 22% of principals selected this from the list of ways they interact with Pacific families and/or community leaders. The same pattern is evident for the item about disaggregation of data into different Pacific nations. In 2019, 28% of principals either strongly agreed or agreed that they did this, compared with 14% of principals who selected this in 2024.

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31 A statistically significant relationship was found between this item with school size, with 56% of principals selecting "we don't currently have Pacific students" coming from smaller schools with a roll of 1-100.

32 A statistically significant relationship was found between school's region and the selection of this item. More than half of principals selecting this lead schools in the Auckland region. There was no statistically significant relationship between region and other items.

FIGURE 15 Schools' interactions with Pacific families and/or community leaders (n = 166)



Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

Adding to our understanding of relationships with Pacific families and/or community leaders, around one-fifth of principals responding to a later question highlighted building relationships with families as the most effective thing for Pacific students in the past 5 years. This included Pacific parent representation on the Board, providing opportunities for Pacific families to provide feedback to the school through fono, and being aware of what was happening in the wider community (see “Improving equity” section under Inclusion domain).

### Working collaboratively with a focus on student attendance

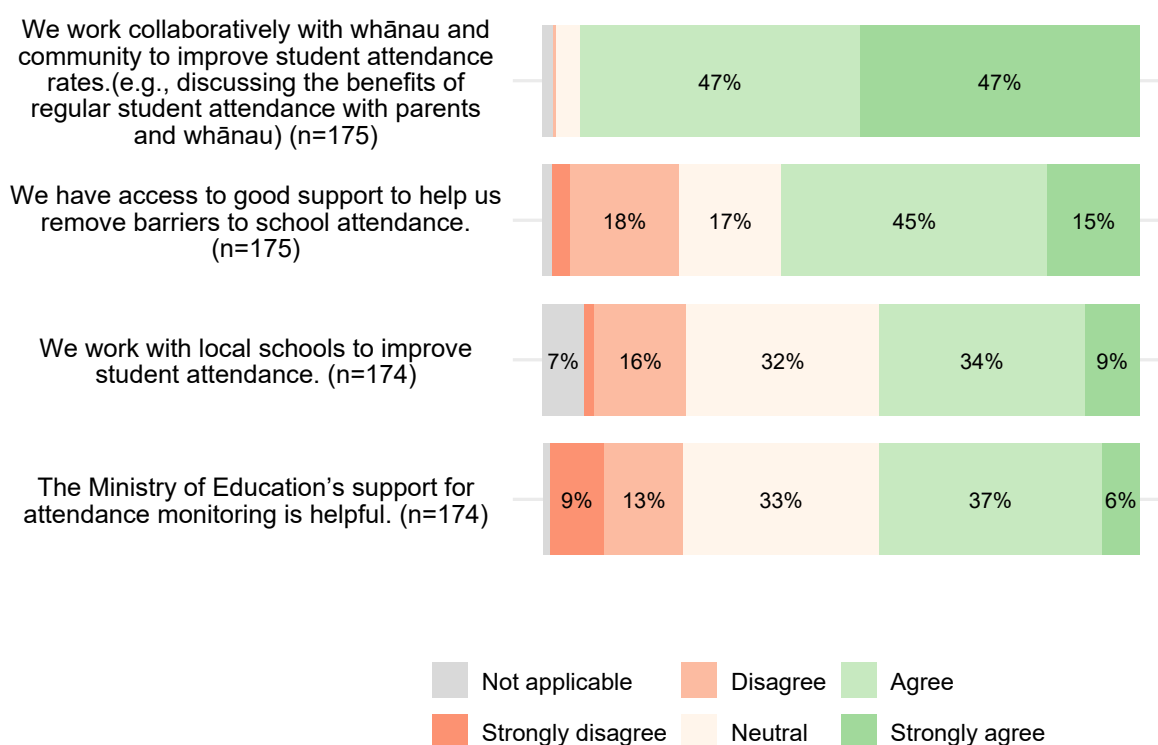
As student attendance is a current concern for schools as well as a priority for the Ministry of Education, we added a new section about this topic in the 2024 survey. As reported in the “Issues facing your school” section above, 34% of principals selected “improving attendance” as a major issue facing their school. Principals at schools with more socioeconomic barriers were the most likely to select this option (60%). These data reflect principals' concerns about chronic absence rates. These rates are higher in low socioeconomic communities, have been on the rise since 2015, and peaked during the COVID pandemic in 2022 (Education Review Office, 2024a).



### **Schools were working with whānau and communities to improve attendance, but needed ongoing support**

Figure 16 shows that most schools (94%) were working collaboratively with whānau and their community to improve attendance rates, whereas a smaller proportion (43%) were working with local schools. Over half (60%) thought they had access to good assistance to help remove barriers to attendance; however, only some (43%) thought the Ministry of Education's support for attendance monitoring was helpful. Collectively these data suggest schools are continuing to work on improving attendance but also require effective ongoing support.

**FIGURE 16 Views of working on student attendance**



## **Te marautanga me te aromatawai | Curriculum and assessment**

The national curriculum has been in a substantial period of transition since the 2019 national survey. These transitions, which were still in progress at the time of the 2024 survey and this report, represent the most significant period of national curriculum change since the release of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) in 2007 and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (TMoA) in 2008. The curriculum and assessment domain garnered principals' perspectives on these changes and on assessment practices in their school. The teacher survey also included questions on both these areas at the individual teacher and classroom level.

### **The updated New Zealand curriculum**

In 2019, a process was initiated to “refresh” the whole national curriculum, with sector input and engagement, over a phased period. Aotearoa New Zealand's histories, as the first piece of new curriculum content to emerge, was drafted in 2020, shared for feedback and trialling in 2021, and

gazetted in 2022 for schools to begin using from 2023. This was followed by a refresh of the social sciences learning area (within which the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories content sits), with a draft shared for feedback in 2022 (New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 2021) and a "final draft" released but not gazetted in late 2022.<sup>33</sup>

After that, English and Mathematics and Statistics learning areas were refreshed, with drafts circulated for feedback in early 2023 and finalised documents released in late 2023.<sup>34</sup> Other draft pieces of the curriculum, such as the draft Te Mātaiaho framework, were shared widely for sector feedback in 2022–23.<sup>35</sup>

Following the election of a new coalition Government in November 2023, it was formally announced that the English and Mathematics and Statistics learning areas would be updated again.<sup>36</sup> The updates were done in two phases. In August–September 2024, a draft English learning area for Years 0–6, and a draft learning area for Mathematics and Statistics for Years 0–8, were circulated for sector feedback (Bolstad et al., 2024; White et al., 2024). Finalised content was gazetted on 31 October 2024, requiring schools to be using these from the beginning of 2025.

Because many parts of the curriculum update process were still in play at the time of our national survey completed by principals in late 2024, we focused our curriculum questions in three areas: 1) principals' perspectives on the direction and pace of curriculum updates; 2) their views about the English and Mathematics and Statistics learning areas, including the focus on "structured approaches" to teaching in these areas; and 3) implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories.

### ***Principals supported the direction, but not pace, of curriculum updates***

A majority (70%) of principals agreed or strongly agreed that the updated curriculum changes are "going in the right direction", and nearly one in five (19%) chose a neutral response (Figure 17).<sup>37</sup> However, the picture was reversed for the item about the pace of curriculum change. A majority (71%) of principals disagreed that these changes were happening at an appropriate pace,<sup>38</sup> with 40% strongly disagreeing. Only 16% indicated agreement about the appropriateness of the pace of change, with only 4% strongly agreeing.

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33 Only the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories content was required to be used in 2023. The full Social Sciences learning area implementation was released so that schools could begin to use it in 2023, but this was not required until 2026.

34 Like Social Sciences, these learning areas were not yet gazetted but the expectation at that time was that schools would be required to use these by 2026, by which time the whole curriculum refresh process would have been completed.

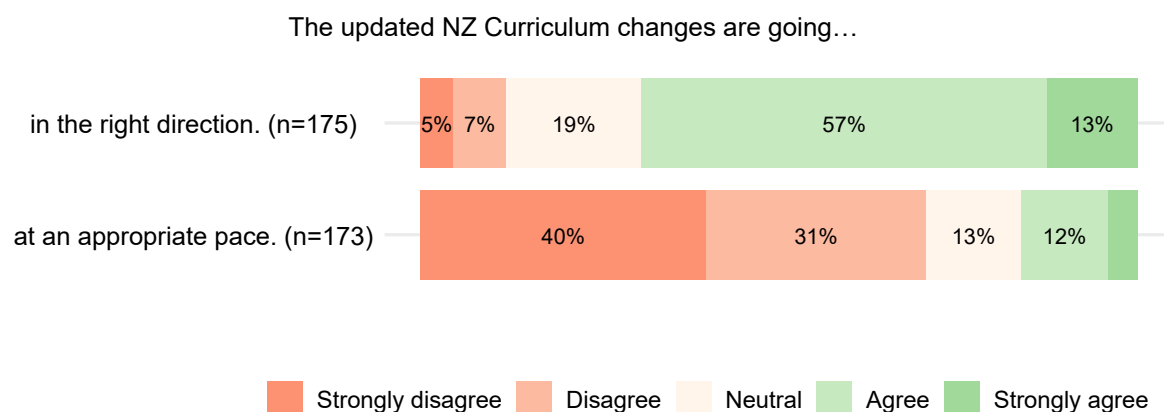
35 Other learning areas (Science, Technology, The Arts, Health and PE, Learning Languages) had been scheduled for a phased refresh, feedback, and release process across 2023–25. However, no other draft learning areas were released for sector feedback prior to the 2023 election.

36 Various terms to describe the curriculum change have been used, including "refreshing", "strengthening", and "updating". At the time of writing, the term "updating" appeared to be most commonly used in Ministry of Education and ministerial communications.

37 The 2024 National survey of primary school teachers shows that teachers were less positive. Just over half (53%) of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the New Zealand curriculum changes are going in the right direction, with more than a third (37%) choosing a neutral response.

38 This is very similar to an NZEI survey undertaken in September 2024, where 77.5% of principals said the curriculum change was "too fast to be effective". See <https://www.nzeiteriuroa.org.nz/about-us/media-releases/curriculum-change-too-fast-to-be-effective-say-teachers-and-principals?>

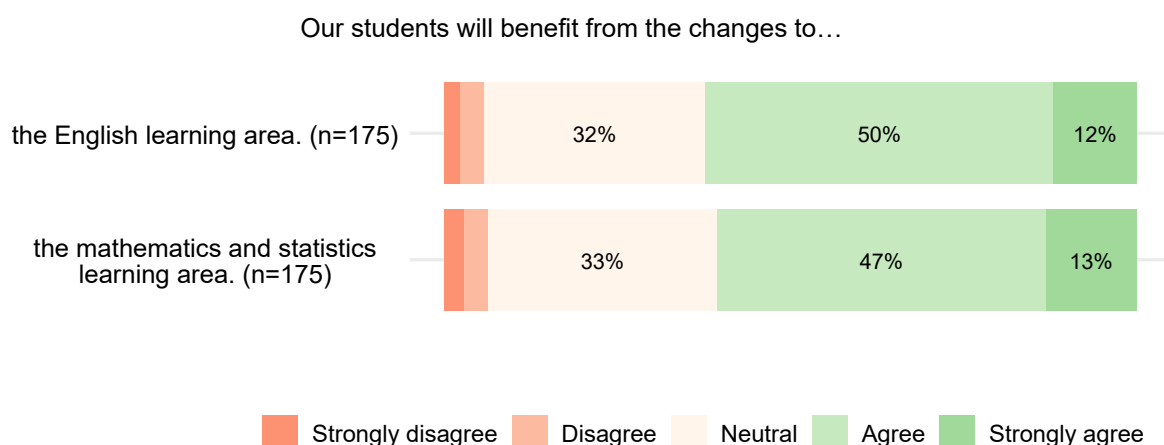
FIGURE 17 Views of the updated New Zealand curriculum



***Principals either agreed or were neutral about whether students would benefit from changes to English, mathematics, and statistics***

As shown in Figure 18, over half of principals indicated that their students will benefit from the changes to the English learning area (62%) and the Mathematics and Statistics learning area (60%), with a further third selecting a neutral response (32% for English, 33% for Mathematics and Statistics). The high proportion of neutral responses likely signals uncertainty, as the draft documents for both learning areas had only recently been shared for feedback, and the finalised versions were released during our survey period. Principals may therefore have had varying levels of familiarity with the curriculum documents, or felt it was too soon to say, given that final details about implementation supports and timelines were still emerging at the time they responded to the survey. Additionally, the neutral responses may also reflect principals' uncertainty about the degree to which the changes would benefit their students.

FIGURE 18 Views of the impacts on students

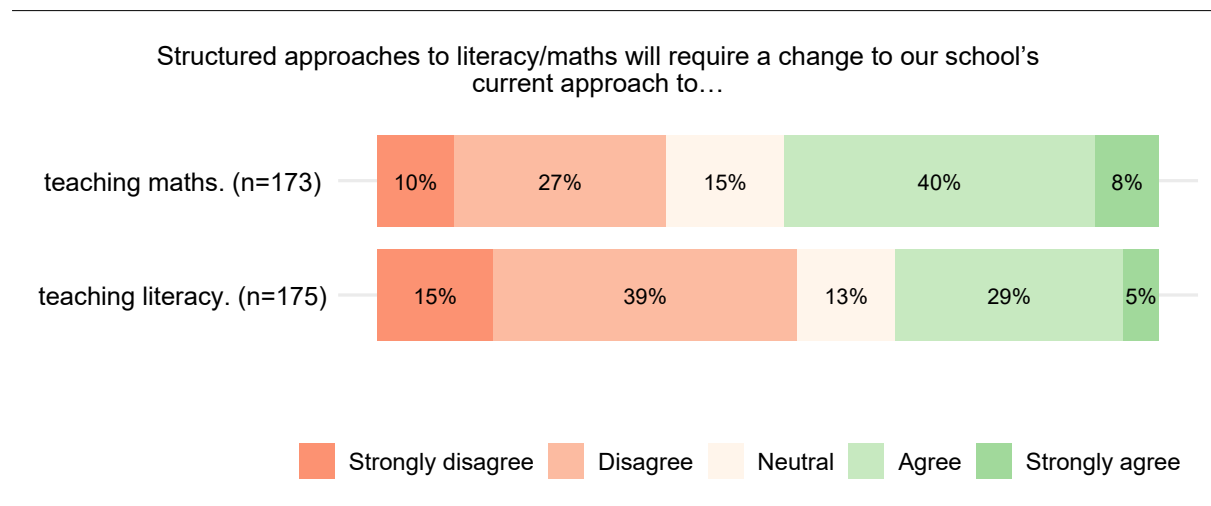


**Nearly half of the principals indicated a structured approach would require changes to their maths teaching, while about a third felt the same for literacy**

Throughout 2024, the sector was informed about an intent to ensure all schools were using “structured” approaches to the teaching of literacy and mathematics. The Ministry of Education funded a PLD programme for structured approaches to literacy from Term 3, 2024, initially available to a cohort of Years 0–3 teachers, and expanding to Years 4–8 teachers from 2025.<sup>39</sup> While there are some variances of definition about what a “structured approach to literacy” means, there is greater disagreement about what a “structured approach” means in the context of mathematics and statistics (Bolstad et al., 2024).

In the 2024 survey, we asked principals whether structured approaches would require a change to their school’s current approach to maths and literacy (Figure 19). Nearly half of principals (48%) indicated that a structured approach would require a change in their school’s current approach to teaching maths, while around a third (34%) felt a change would be needed to their current approaches to teaching literacy.

**FIGURE 19 Views of the impacts of structured approaches on schools**



**Schools were at varying stages with implementing Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories curriculum**

The Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories curriculum was not available when we last surveyed primary schools in 2019. However, we did ask questions about this in the 2022 NZCER national survey of secondary school principals, including where schools saw themselves in relation to four stages indicated in the Ministry of Education’s guidance material to support implementation of this content.<sup>40</sup>

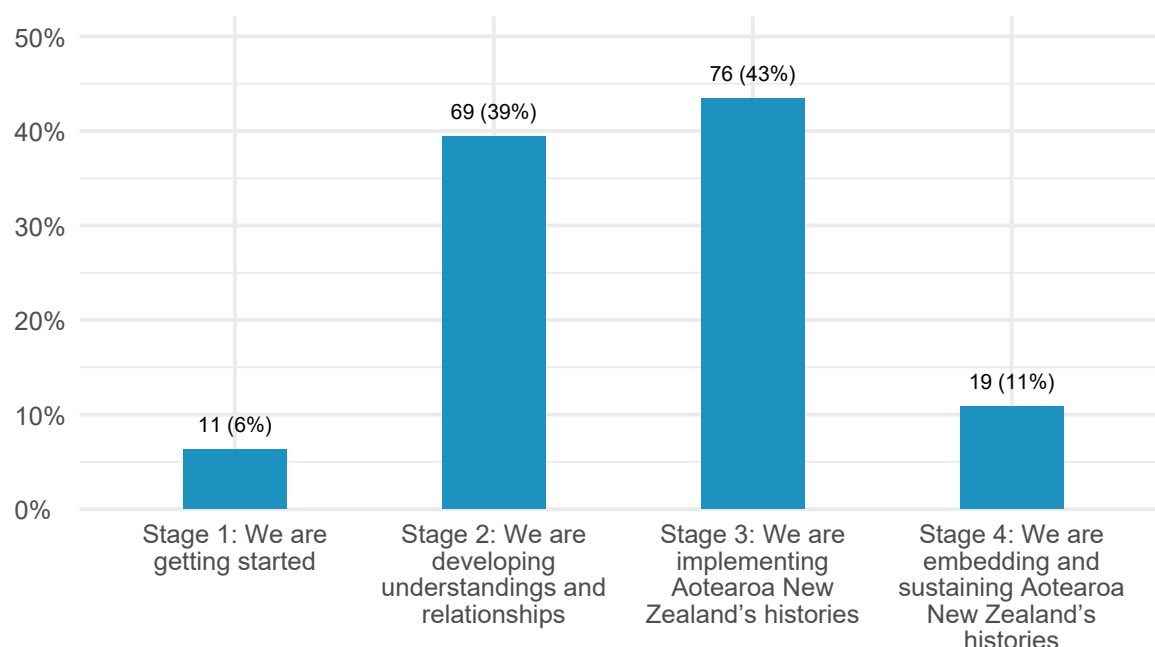
In the 2024 primary survey, just over half of the principals said their school was either at stage 3 (implementing—43%) or stage 4 (embedding and sustaining—11%) Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories. More than a third (39%) placed their school at stage 2—developing understandings and relationships, and a few (6%) said they were at stage 1—just getting started (Figure 20). While direct comparisons are inappropriate for several reasons (such as the timing of when the curriculum content was released),

<sup>39</sup> <https://pld.education.govt.nz/structured-literacy-and-maths-pld/structured-literacy-approaches/>

<sup>40</sup> To support school leaders with implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories, the Ministry of Education produced two Leading local curriculum guides (Ministry of Education, 2021, 2022). These included a self-review tool, depicted as a poutama or staircase, which described four stages a school might progress through from “getting started”, to “embedding and sustaining Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories”.

it is worth noting that, when the same question was asked of secondary school principals in 2022, a greater proportion of those principals located their schools at stage 1 (28%) or stage 2 (42%), with fewer saying they were at stages 3 (21%) or 4 (9%).

FIGURE 20 **Stage of the implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories (n = 175)**



Two other questions relevant to the implementation of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories were asked in other domains of the survey and have already been reported (see above domains—supporting and resourcing, and collaborative relationships).

- Sixty-one percent of principals indicated they have needed, and can readily access, external expertise for increasing teachers' knowledge of local and national histories, while 28% indicated this support was needed but could not be readily accessed.
- Forty-one percent of principals indicated their curriculum planning for Aotearoa New Zealand's histories has involved input from local hapū and/or iwi.

## Assessment practices

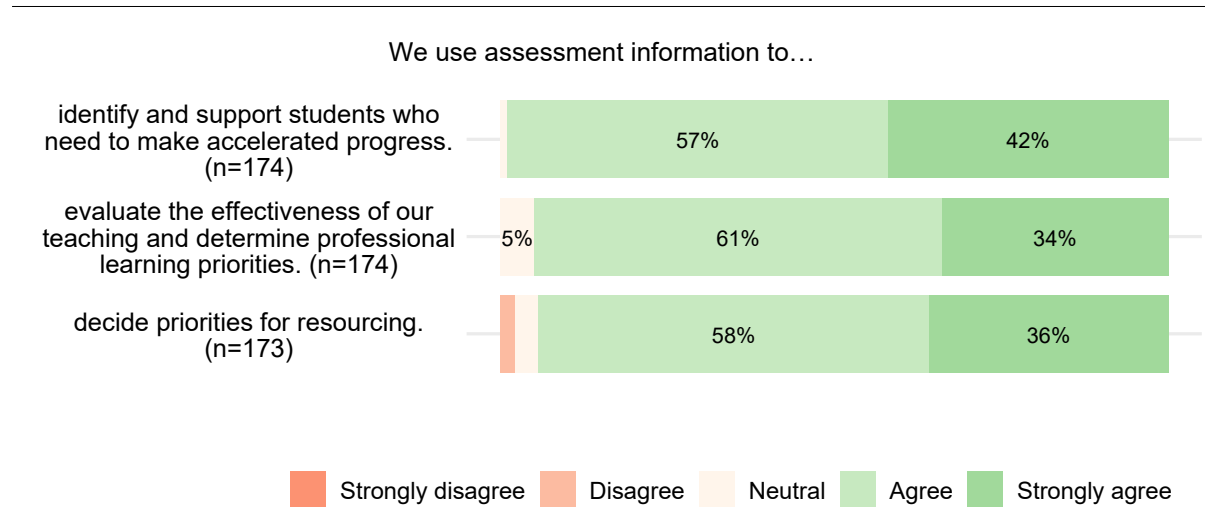
In Aotearoa New Zealand, the phrases “assessment for learning” and “formative assessment” have come to be used interchangeably. Inherent in both terms and central to both approaches is the importance of using assessment information to inform and improve students' learning and teachers' teaching (Ministry of Education, 2011). As in earlier surveys, the 2024 survey included a series of items about principals' use of formative assessment approaches.

### ***Principals still indicated that formative assessment practices underpinned their assessment approaches, but the proportion who “strongly agreed” has dropped since 2019***

As in 2019, the 2024 survey asked principals about the ways in which they used assessment information to inform and improve students' learning and teachers' teaching. The items shown in Figure 21, which describe formative uses of assessment information, are similar to those included in the 2019 survey.

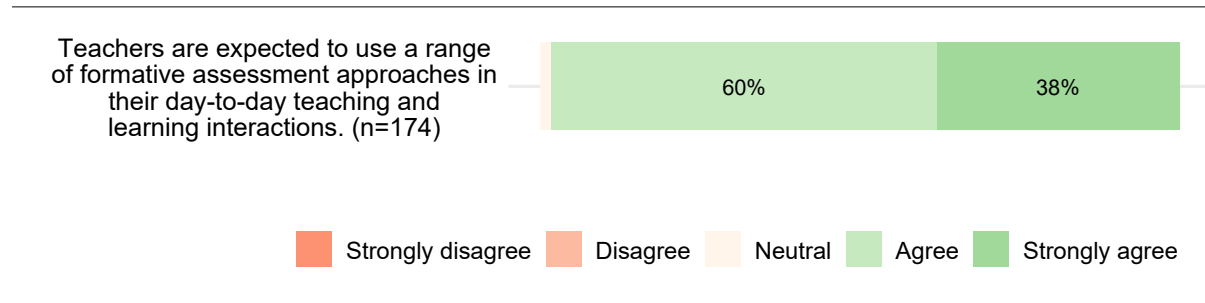
The agreement rates with these items were consistently high across the two survey cycles, showing that principals continue to believe that formative assessment practices underpin their assessment approaches. However, there are meaningful differences in the distribution of “agree” and “strongly agree” responses across these two periods. In general, more principals indicated that they strongly agreed with this set of statements in 2019 than in 2024. For example, almost all principals in both years (98% in 2019 and 99% in 2024) indicated that they used assessment information to identify and support students who needed to make accelerated progress, whereas 42% strongly agreed in 2024, down from 58% in 2019.

FIGURE 21 Purpose of using assessment at schools



In 2024, a new item was included for principals about teachers' use of formative assessment approaches. It asked principals to rate their agreement with the statement “teachers are expected to use a range of formative assessment approaches in their day-to-day teaching and learning interactions”. As shown in Figure 22, almost all (98%) principals agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. These results align closely with teacher responses to an almost identical item in the 2024 teacher survey, where 95% of teachers agreed (54%) or strongly agreed (39%) that they used a range of formative assessment approaches in their day-to-day teaching and learning interactions.

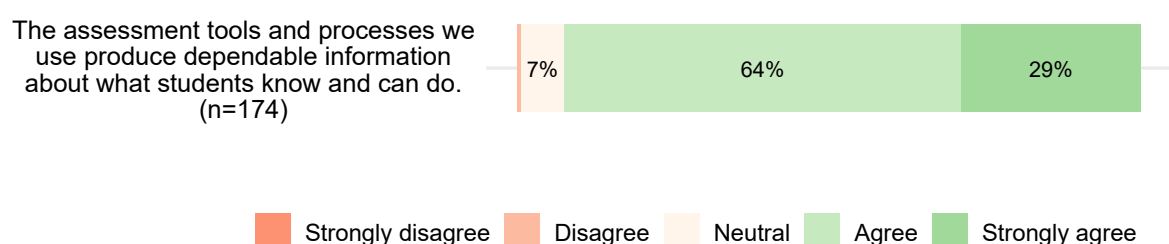
FIGURE 22 Use of formative assessment in teaching



### ***Principals continued to trust the assessment information they had access to***

Principals were also asked about the extent to which they agreed that the assessment tools and processes they used produced dependable, or trustworthy, information. A similar item was included in the 2019 survey; however, that item focused on the production of **reliable** rather than **dependable** assessment information. A dependable assessment is one that “has both high validity and reliability” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 28). In 2019, 98% of principals agreed that the assessments they used produced reliable information about what students knew and could do. As can be seen in Figure 23, 93% of principals at agreed with the 2024 statement, which focused on the production of dependable assessment information.

FIGURE 23 **Dependability of the assessment tools and processes**



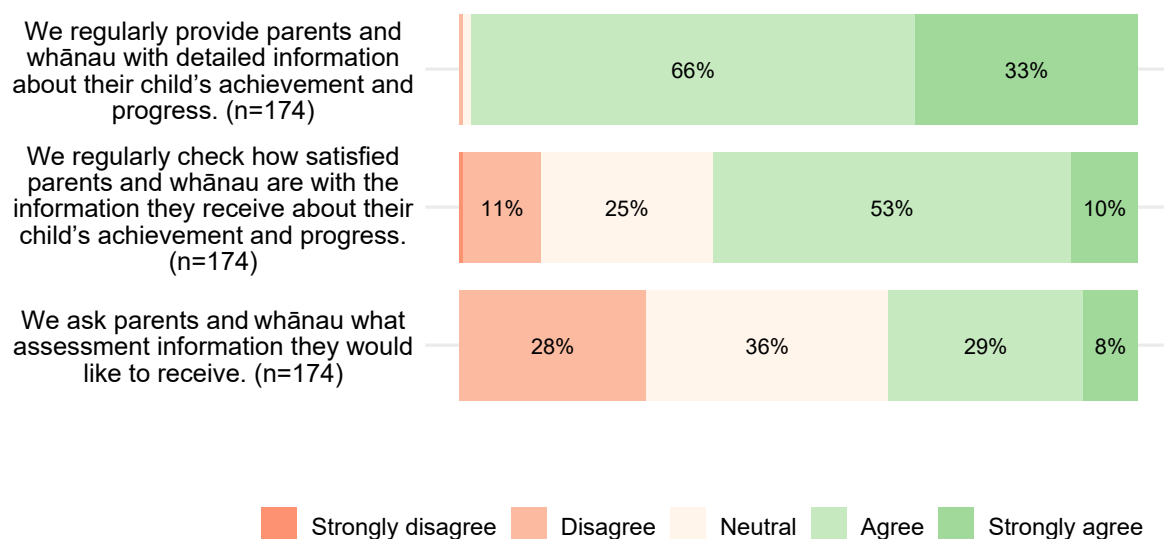
### ***Schools regularly provided whānau with information about progress and achievement, but could consult more about the types of information whānau received***

In both the 2019 and 2024 surveys, principals were asked about their schools’ reporting to parents and whānau regarding their child’s achievement and progress.

The statement “we regularly provide parents and whānau with detailed information about their child’s achievement and progress” were included in both years, with the word “regularly” added in the 2024 survey. In both years, almost all principals at least agreed that they provided parents with detailed information about their child’s achievement and progress. In 2019, principals’ responses were evenly distributed between those who agreed (50%) and those who strongly agreed (48%). As shown in Figure 24, a different response pattern was evident in 2024, with 66% of principals agreeing and 33% strongly agreeing with the comparable statement. This is consistent with a previously noted shift in the pattern of principals’ agree and strongly agree responses to assessment-focused items.

In 2024, two new items about reporting to parents and whānau were included in the principal survey. Both provided principals with the opportunity to reflect upon the extent to which parents and whānau were consulted about the assessment information they received. As can be seen in Figure 24, over half the principals surveyed either agreed (53%) or strongly agreed (10%) that they regularly checked how satisfied parents and whānau were with the information they received about their child’s achievement and progress. In contrast, just over a third of principals either agreed (29%) or strongly agreed (8%) that they asked parents and whānau what assessment information they would like to receive.

FIGURE 24 Schools' reports to parents and whānau



## Te whakaako me te ako | Teaching and learning

This domain asked principals about two areas of teaching and learning: Māori language learning and use of AI.<sup>41</sup> AI is a developing area, where there is a gap in evidence about the extent of its use in primary schools. As the integration of generative AI into schools grows, it will be important to understand its use and impact. Questions about Māori language learning add to the evidence base about Māori-medium education within predominantly English-medium schools, and Māori language learning more broadly.

### Teaching and learning in te reo Māori

The 2024 national survey introduced a new question asking principals whether their school provided ākonga the opportunity to learn in a reo Māori bilingual or immersion setting (Levels 1 and 2). This means settings where the curriculum is taught in te reo Māori for more than 12.5 and up to 25 hours per week. Our survey suggested that most schools (81%) do not offer opportunities for ākonga to learn in a reo Māori bilingual or immersion setting (Levels 1 and 2).<sup>42</sup>

#### ***One-third of schools offering bilingual or immersion opportunities did not have places for all ākonga who applied***

For the 33 schools (19%) that reported offering bilingual or immersion learning opportunities, a follow-up question explored whether they had places available for all ākonga who applied. Just over half (58%, n = 19) of these schools reported having sufficient places for all ākonga, one in three schools (33%, n = 11) reported they were unable to accommodate all applicants, and three schools were unsure (9%). This highlights capacity constraints in some schools, which may impact access to bilingual or immersion education for ākonga.

<sup>41</sup> Further questions about Teaching and learning domain are included in the teacher survey.

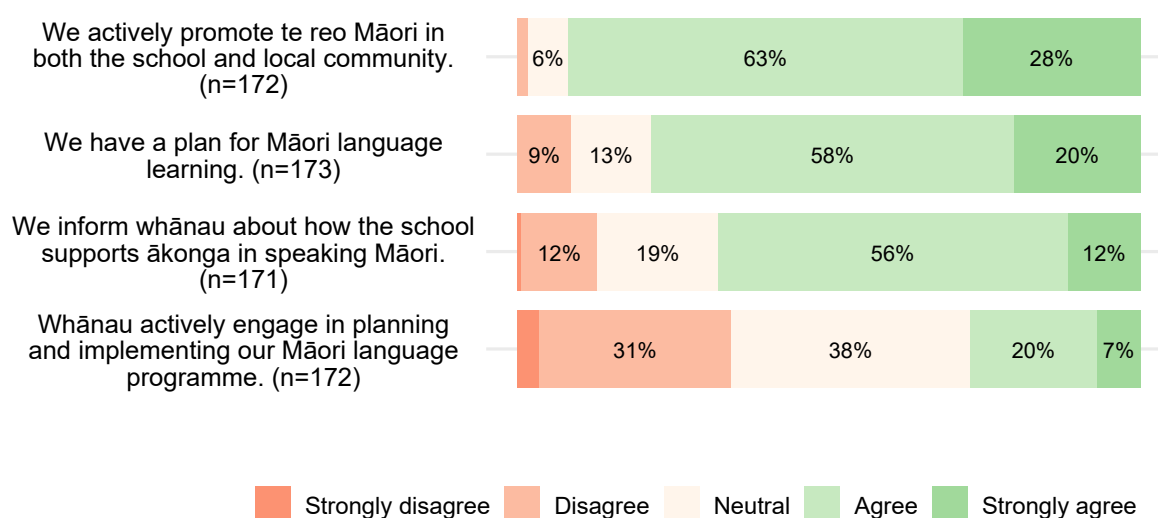
<sup>42</sup> Note that we did not ask about the provision of bilingual classes at Levels 3 or 4, where the curriculum is taught in te reo Māori for more than 3 and less than 12.5 hours a week.



### ***Most schools actively promoted te reo Māori, with a potential to increase whānau engagement in reo Māori programme planning and implementation***

Taking a broader perspective on Māori language learning, principals were asked to rate their agreement with several statements about Māori language learning in their schools (Figure 25). The results provide insight into the extent to which schools actively promote te reo Māori, have structured plans in place, support ākonga in their reo Māori journey, and engage with whānau in planning and implementing reo Māori programmes within schools.

**FIGURE 25 Māori language learning at schools**



Nearly all principals (91%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their school actively promotes te reo Māori within both the school and local community—similar to 88% in 2019 survey. However, in 2024, 28% of principals strongly agreed with this statement, down from 38% in 2019. The difference in the response pattern indicates a slight decrease in the strength of commitment. The same pattern was observed for whether a school has a plan for Māori language learning. Most schools (78%) have a plan, but the proportion of principals who strongly agreed decreased from 42% in 2019 to 20% in 2024. The proportion of those who disagreed increased from 2% in 2019 to 9% in 2024.

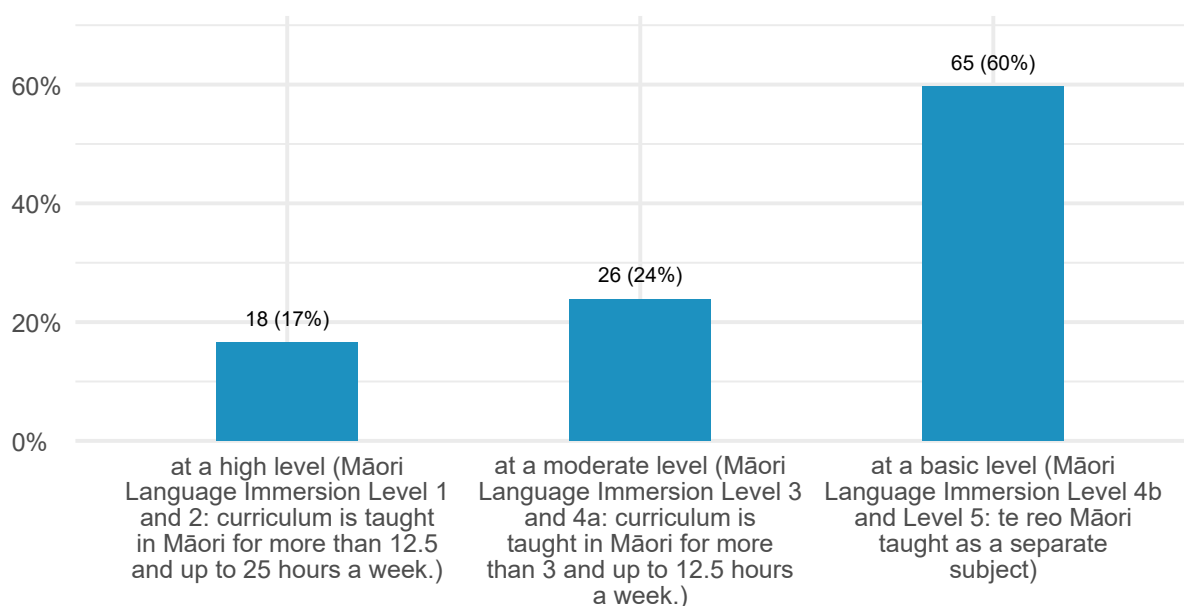
Compared with 2019 (53%), a larger proportion of principals (68%) indicated that they keep whānau informed about how ākonga are supported in speaking te reo Māori. However, just over one-quarter of principals (27%) agreed or strongly agreed that whānau are actively engaged in planning and implementing their school's Māori language programme. This marks a notable decline from 2019, when 50% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with a similar statement. The proportion of those who strongly agreed has dropped from 20% in 2019 to just 7% in 2024. At the same time, the proportion of principals who disagreed has more than doubled, increasing from 14% in 2019 to 31% in 2024. A large proportion (38%) indicated a neutral response, which may reflect uncertainty about whānau involvement or a lack of visibility around their participation in reo Māori programme planning.

### Most principals reported challenges in finding kaiako to teach te reo Māori

Most (70%) surveyed principals reported having trouble in finding kaiako to teach te reo Māori, while 30% indicated that they did not face this challenge. This finding highlights an ongoing issue in recruiting and retaining qualified te reo Māori educators, which may impact the accessibility and quality of Māori language learning in schools.

To further understand the nature of these difficulties, principals who reported challenges in finding kaiako were asked to specify the level at which they experienced shortages (Figure 26).

FIGURE 26 Level that the schools have difficulty in finding kaiako to teach te reo Māori (n = 109)



Recruitment challenges are most evident at the basic level (Levels 4b and 5, where te reo Māori is taught as a separate subject), with 60% of principals identifying this as a challenge. Shortages in higher-level immersion settings were less common, partly reflecting that fewer schools offer these opportunities. A quarter (24%) of principals reported difficulties finding kaiako to teach at a moderate level (Levels 3 and 4a, where te reo Māori is used for 3–12.5 hours per week) and 17% at a high level (Levels 1 and 2, where te reo Māori is used for more than 12.5 hours per week).

These findings suggest that, while shortages exist across all levels of Māori language instruction, the greatest difficulty is in recruiting kaiako to teach te reo Māori as a separate subject rather than in immersion settings. This likely reflects that more schools offer or want to offer te reo Māori learning opportunities at a “basic” level.

### Use of AI

For the first time, NZCER's National Survey of Primary Schools included a question on AI use. We asked principals about the conversations and use of AI in their schools, their perception of generative AI, and about equitable access (Figure 27).

### ***Two-thirds of principals were having conversations about AI, and responses highlighted the need for more information and PLD in this area***

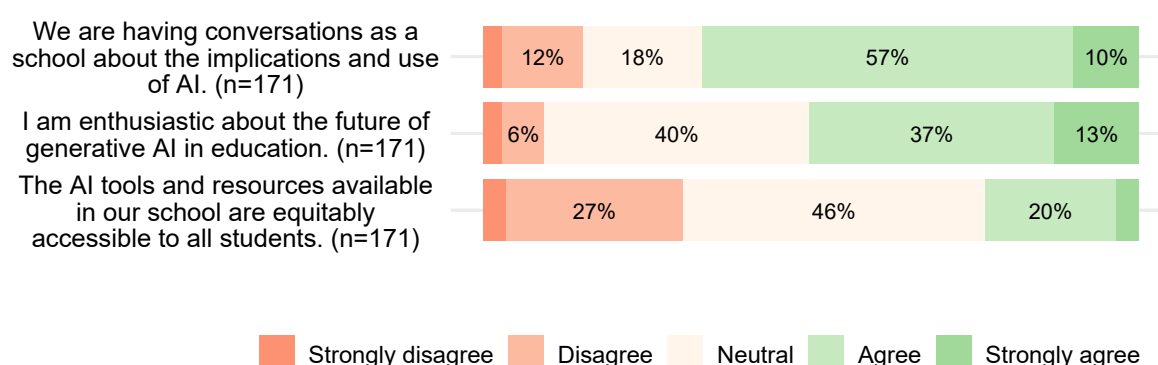
Two-thirds (67%) of principals reported that their school was having conversations about the implications and use of AI in education. This suggests an awareness of AI's role in primary schools and its potential impact on teaching and learning.

When asked about their enthusiasm about the future of generative AI in education, half of the principals responded positively, with 37% agreeing and 13% strongly agreeing. In contrast, only 9% held a negative stance, but many principals (40%) selected neutral, indicating uncertainty or a need for further information on the subject.

Principals also indicated that equity in AI access is a concern. Only 24% of principals said that AI tools and resources in their schools are equitably accessible to all students. In contrast, almost a third (31%, combining 27% disagreeing and 4% strongly disagreeing) felt that access is not equitable. Again, nearly half (46%) of principals surveyed selected the neutral option, suggesting that many may not yet have the necessary context to fully assess equity in AI access.

This may point to a need for further PLD to help school leaders recognise and navigate equity challenges in AI integration, which also aligns with an earlier finding, where over half (56%) of principals identified AI in education as a key area for future PLD (see Figure 10). These mixed responses may also reflect that many schools are still in the early stages of AI adoption, with some engaging with generative AI only minimally.

**FIGURE 27 Use of AI tools in education**



## **Te hao i te katoa | Inclusion**

This section reports on the Inclusion domain, beginning with principals' perspectives on students' access to digital technologies. It then explores how effectively schools are embedding approaches to affirming the identities of ākonga Māori and Pacific students. Finally, it presents key themes in responses to qualitative open-ended questions where we asked principals to tell us the most effective thing their school had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for four groups of students: ākonga Māori; Pacific students; students with additional learning support needs; and students with complex social and emotional needs.

## Equitable access to digital technologies

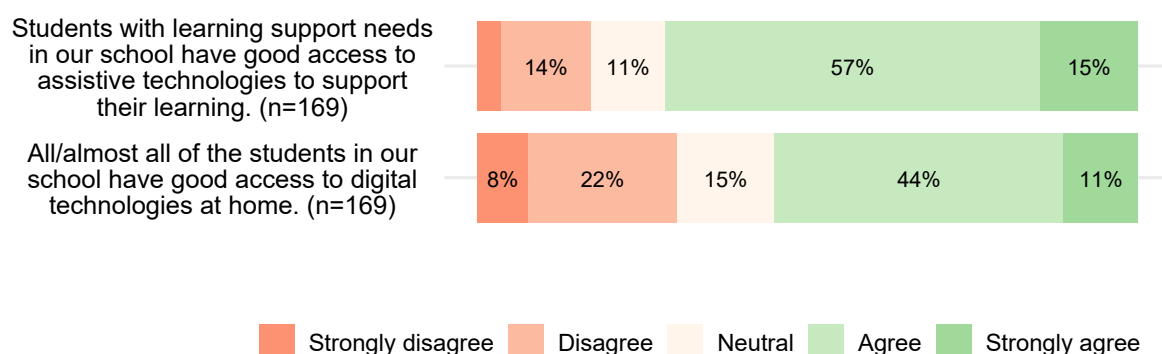
### *Most principals reported good access to assistive technologies for students, but digital access at home was inequitable*

Figure 28 shows that most principals (72%) agreed or strongly agreed that students with learning support needs at their schools had good access to assistive technologies to support their learning, similar to 2019 (75%).<sup>43</sup> Over half of the principals (55%) agreed or strongly agreed that all or most of their students had good access to digital technologies at home. However, around one-third of principals (30%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

A statistically significant relationship was found between a school's EQI and principal agreement with the statement "all/almost all of the students in our school have good access to digital technologies at home". Principals in schools with fewer socioeconomic challenges showed the highest agreement (78%, with 18% strongly agreed and 60% agreed). Only 7% of these principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that all or almost all students had good access to digital technologies at home. Around half of the principals (49%) in schools with moderate socioeconomic barriers agreed (4% strongly agreeing and 45% agreeing). In contrast, less than one-third (31%) of principals in schools with more socioeconomic barriers agreed or strongly disagreed that all or almost all students had good access to digital technologies at home. They also had the highest level of disagreement (59%, with 19% strongly disagreeing and 40% disagreeing). This highlights that a gap remains in digital access between schools based on socioeconomic challenges.

This is echoed by an earlier question about the major issues facing schools. The "cost of purchasing, maintaining, and replacing digital devices and infrastructure" was identified by half of the principals (50%) as a major issue, ranking it among the top three concerns (see Table 2).

FIGURE 28 Views of equitable access to digital technologies



## Affirming the identities of ākonga Māori

In 2024, principals were asked to gauge the extent to which their school has embedded approaches and practices that affirm the identities of ākonga Māori (Figure 29). These included the incorporation of tikanga Māori and reo Māori into schoolwide practices, access to co-curricular activities, the use of a tuakana-teina approach, and whānau classes. These items were also included in the 2019 survey, with a slight wording change made in 2024.

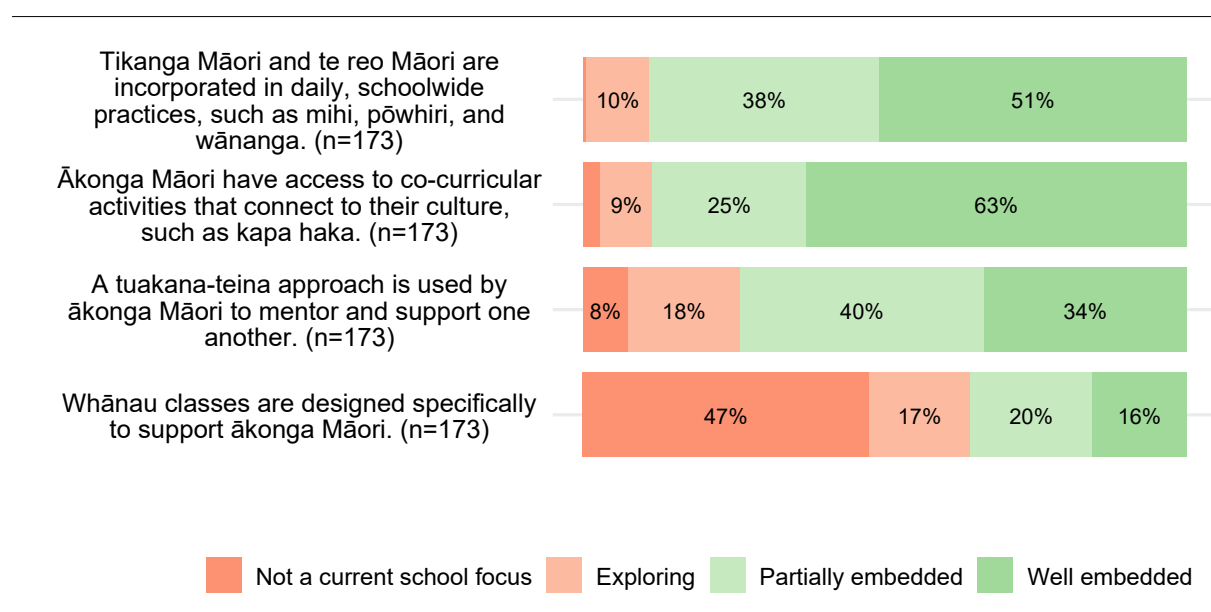
<sup>43</sup> In 2019, this item read as "students who need assistive technologies to support their learning have good access to these".

### ***Most schools had partially or well embedded practices that affirmed ākonga Māori identities, but there were declines since 2019***

Most principals (89%) indicated that tikanga and te reo Māori are embedded in daily, schoolwide practices, with 51% reporting these practices as “well embedded” and 38% choosing “partially embedded”. However, the overall trend indicates a slight decline compared with 2019 (95%, 47% choosing “well embedded” and 48% choosing “partially embedded”). The same proportion (89%) indicated that “ākonga Māori have access to co-curricular activities that connect to their culture, such as kapa haka” was well or partially embedded, similar to 2019. Three-quarters (74%) of principals reported that the tuakana-teina approach is well or partially embedded in their school, dropping from 82% in 2019.

Just over one-third of principals (36%) reported that whānau classes were well or partially embedded, compared with just under half (46%) in 2019. Just 16% of principals said this was “well embedded” compared with 25% in 2019. There was an increase from around half (53%) in 2019 to just under two-thirds of principals (64%) in 2024 who reported that whānau classes designed specifically to support ākonga Māori was either “not a current school focus” or something they were “exploring”.

**FIGURE 29 The degree to which the approaches to affirming the identities of ākonga Māori are embedded in schools**



### **Affirming the identities of Pacific students**

A similar question was asked about schools' use of practices and approaches that affirm the identities of Pacific students, focusing on visibility of Pacific values and cultures in schoolwide practices, access to co-curricular activities connected to Pacific cultures, and use of Pacific ways of learning. The top three items shown in Figure 30 were also asked in 2019, allowing comparison.

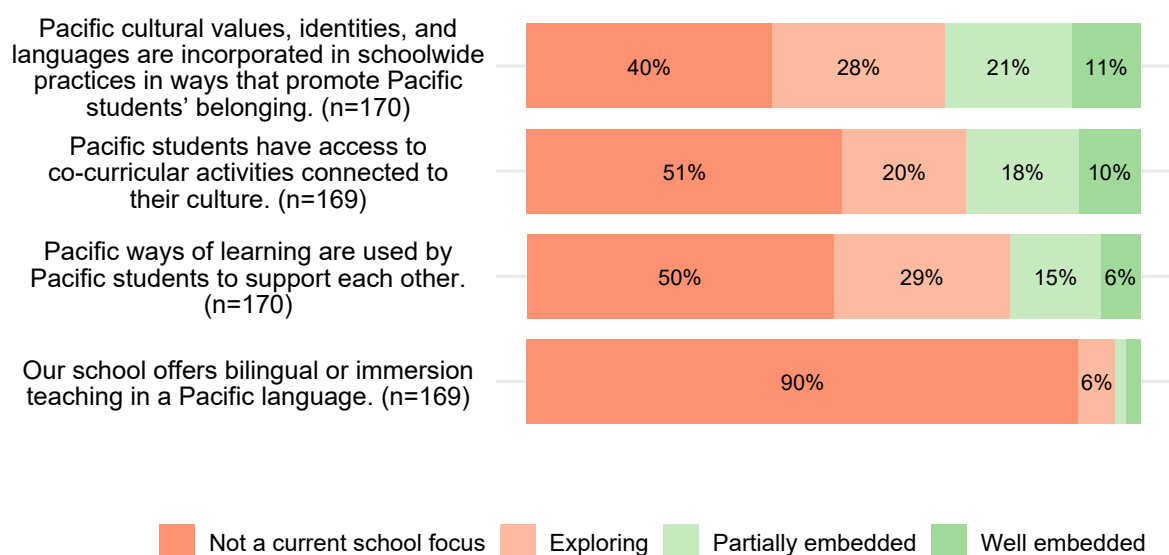
### ***Compared with 2019, fewer schools had a focus on approaches that affirmed the identities of Pacific students***

For all three approaches surveyed across 2 years, 2024 results show a decrease in the proportion of schools where these are “well” or “partially” embedded, and an increase in the proportion of schools where they are “not a focus”, compared with 2019.<sup>44</sup> A larger proportion of principals (40%, up from 30% in 2019) indicated that “Pacific cultural values, identities, and languages are incorporated in schoolwide practices in ways that promote Pacific students’ belonging” is *not* a current school focus. Half of the principals indicated that Pacific students having access to co-curricular activities connected to their culture (51%, up from 37% in 2019) or the use of Pacific ways of learning to support each other (50%, up from 33% in 2019) is *not* a current school focus. At the other end of the response scale, there are fewer schools that have these approaches “partially” or “well” embedded. The biggest decline was for “Pacific ways of learning are used by Pacific students to support each other”, with one-fifth (21%) of principals indicating this was “partially” or “well” embedded in their school, compared with 40% in 2019.

This is the first time the survey asked whether a school offers bilingual or immersion teaching in a Pacific language. This is not a current focus for most schools, with 10% of schools either having bilingual or immersion teaching or exploring it. Four percent of principals say this is partially or well embedded in their school. This is the same proportion of principals who responded in 2019 that children transitioning from Pacific language nests could continue learning their language in the school.

Although we reported relationships with school decile in 2019, in 2024 there was no statistically significant difference in responses from principals from schools in different EQI groups.

**FIGURE 30 The degree to which the approaches to affirming the identities of Pacific students are embedded in schools**



<sup>44</sup> We considered whether the trend might be due to the sample differences (e.g., whether we have more schools that do not have Pacific students in our 2024 sample than 2019). However, we do not believe this is the case. This year, 20% of principals selected “we do not have Pacific students”, compared with 30% of principals (44 out of 145) indicating the same in an open-ended question in 2019.

## Improving equity

In the only open-ended question in the survey, we asked principals to tell us the most effective thing their school had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for four groups of students: ākonga Māori; Pacific students; students with additional learning support needs; and students with complex social and emotional needs.

Responses were analysed thematically to identify key focus areas and initiatives that schools have implemented to support each of the four groups of students. Note that, although the question asked for “the most effective thing”, some principals described multiple interconnected things, suggesting that the themes we highlight don’t occur in isolation.

### *Achieving equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori*

Principals from 125 schools shared what they saw as the most effective thing their school had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori. The remaining 33 responses were either left blank, partially completed, marked as not applicable, or noted that the school had no ākonga Māori enrolled.

#### School community and culture

Almost half of the respondents highlighted the embedding of tikanga, te reo, and te ao Māori values and worldviews into daily, schoolwide practices as a key approach to fostering an inclusive and culturally affirming environment for ākonga Māori. Schools reported introducing whānau and whanaungatanga groups, kapa haka, and daily tikanga-based routines, such as karakia and mihi whakatau, to reinforce cultural belonging. Increased visibility of te reo Māori through signage and normalising its use in classrooms were also key initiatives.

Change in kapa haka teacher, Mihi Whakatau termly, roopu hui, looking in our cultural narrative, school name.

Increased the use of te reo through waiata, karakia, mihi whakatau.

Prioritising school as a safe place that celebrates being Māori which is different from child to child.

Changing the school culture so Māori students see themselves in their school.

Some schools renamed learning spaces and adopted Māori values in their school vision and structures, ensuring cultural identity was woven into the fabric of school life. The importance of cultural events and traditions, such as paepae and mihi whakatau, was also emphasised as a way to strengthen student identity and engagement. These initiatives reinforced that the language and culture were valued at every level of school life.

Providing an environment where they can thrive as Māori, like normalising the language, using the full name of our area/kura, making Te Tiriti o Waitangi part of our strategic planning, daily karakia for (beginning of day, kai, end of day), Māori achieving as Māori.

Embedding Māori kaupapa into celebrations, curriculum and tuakana-teina approach.

Enacting the Tiriti of Waitangi through school values in daily life. Providing equitable resources for outcomes for learners. Meeting regularly with whanau to discuss.

School focus around normalising te reo Māori.

## Professional development and staffing

Equal in prominence to school community and culture, professional development and staffing were widely reported as critical to achieving equitable outcomes. Schools engaged with initiatives such as Poutama Pounamu, Te Puna Reo, and Ata Rawea to strengthen teacher capability in culturally sustaining pedagogies. Staff participated in professional learning focused on te reo and tikanga Māori, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and Relationship-Based Learning (RBL)<sup>45</sup> to improve engagement with ākonga Māori.

PLD for staff with culturally sustaining practice, student voice, relationships first PLD, engagement with whānau, wananga and Noho, local curriculum, Kāhui Ako journey.

Undertaken intensive Relationship-based Learning PLD based on Russell Bishop's work.

School-wide PLD in RBL. All staff involved. Coaching programme supports development of culturally responsive pedagogies.

In addition to formal training, some schools facilitated noho marae for staff, developed internal mentoring programmes, and encouraged kaiako to upskill in te reo Māori through external courses. Some schools also focused on recruiting and retaining Māori and Pacific staff to ensure diverse role models for students.

## Teaching and learning

Just over one-quarter of respondents identified teaching and learning as a key area for achieving equitable outcomes. Among these schools, some focused on developing local curricula that reflected the histories, values, and traditions of local hapū and iwi. Others worked with mana whenua to incorporate place-based learning, pūrākau (Māori narratives), and kaupapa-driven teaching approaches across subject areas.

Support for students, kaiako and community from a local kaumātua with te reo and te ao Māori, local history and tikanga.

Sharing their local pūrākau and using these for learning is authentic and relatable.

Schools also reported implementing tuakana-teina models to encourage peer learning, while others used DMIC (Developing Mathematical Inquiry Communities) and Teaching to the North-East pedagogies (Bishop, 2019) to ensure culturally sustaining approaches. Additionally, targeted literacy and numeracy interventions were introduced to support ākonga Māori, with an emphasis on equitable access to enrichment opportunities.

When doing whole-school activities, tamariki are in whānau groups. DMIC model of maths and social groupings for learning has made a significant difference for these ākonga.

Developing Māori achievement plan to target accelerated progress for ākonga.

## Collaboration and networks

Around one-quarter of respondents identified collaboration and networks as an important component of achieving equitable outcomes. A frequently mentioned initiative was participation in and support from the Māori Achievement Collaborative (MAC), which provided professional learning and leadership development in culturally sustainable pedagogies and practices. Schools working with MAC and other professional networks benefited from shared expertise and strengthened their ability to embed Māori perspectives in governance, teaching, and learning.

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<sup>45</sup> Based on the work of Bishop (2019).



Even though we have 12 Māori ākonga: We belong to the MAC and had 95% of kaiako learn te reo and tikanga through Takatu. Introduce Paepae, karakia, whakatau, whole-school kapahaka, 3 hours a week of te reo.

This also included establishing or strengthening formal partnerships with hapū, iwi, and mana whenua, ensuring that local knowledge and expertise are embedded in governance and curriculum design. Some schools also worked with their Kāhui Ako to strengthen connections between kura and develop collective strategies for improving outcomes for ākonga Māori.

Connection with iwi and hapū.

Worked alongside our Marae and Māori Achievement Collaborative to redesign our school curriculum.

Marae visits, PLD with hapū and iwi.

Wānanga and Noho, local curriculum, Kāhui Ako journey.

Survey our community, invite our whānau group to talk at board meetings, act on advice from iwi and PD.

Te Tiriti training within Kāhui Ako.

### **Other key areas of focus**

While reported less frequently, several additional focus areas contributed to achieving equitable outcomes:

- **Student-centred development:** Some schools emphasised individualised learning pathways to support ākonga Māori in ways that recognised their identities and aspirations. Strategies included tuakana-teina models, student leadership opportunities, and alternative learning approaches to personalise learning experiences.
- **Whānau and community engagement:** Some schools strengthened relationships with whānau through regular hui, curriculum input, and direct consultation via surveys and advisory groups. Others prioritised ensuring whānau voices were reflected in school decision making and governance.
- **Bilingual and/or immersion classes:** Some schools introduced or expanded Rumaki Reo and dual-medium learning environments to ensure equitable access to Māori-medium education. Noho marae experiences were also used to reinforce te ao Māori learning and language immersion.
- **Strategic focus:** Schools that embedded equity into their strategic direction ensured that Te Tiriti o Waitangi commitments and ākonga Māori achievement were central to annual and long-term planning. Some developed Māori achievement plans, while others refined school policies to align with culturally sustainable pedagogies and practices.

### ***Achieving equity for Pacific students***

Just under half of the principals (n = 82) chose to tell us about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific students. Others skipped this question or responded with “not applicable” or a comment about having no or few Pacific students in their school. There are plausible reasons for principals not to have answered this question (e.g., the question was in a group of four open-ended questions, open-ended questions require more time from principals, schools may have very few Pacific students) but the number of responses could also suggest that principals have more immediate and urgent demands that may have taken the focus off Pacific students.

## Teaching and learning

The biggest theme, mentioned in around half of responses, was teaching and learning, particularly culturally responsive pedagogies. Specific approaches mentioned were RBL and DMIC, both also important in relation to ākonga Māori (see above). Others referred to implementing explicit instruction in maths and reading.

By integrating culturally responsive practices and creating links between Māori and Pasifika heritage, we ensure that all students, including our Pasifika learners, feel a strong sense of pride and engagement in their education.

Self-funded Structured Literacy tutor.

Staff PLD was often mentioned within this teaching and learning focus.

School-wide PLD in RBL. All staff involved. Coaching programme supports development of culturally responsive pedagogies.

Other principals referred to monitoring the progress of individual students.

A deep dive into who and where our Pasifika learners are, and what their learning success looks like.

We have a very low number of Pacific Island students but we closely monitor their progress and have provided additional support where needed.

## Celebrating Pacific cultures

Around a quarter of principals responding to this question reported that they celebrated Pacific cultures through language weeks or having school cultural performance groups.

Celebrating Pacific Language Weeks, incorporating it to our learning programmes for the week.

Resourced for a cultural diversity leader who has lifted the profile of Pacific Language Weeks, and our Pasifika cultural group.

## Relationships with families

A similar proportion highlighted building relationships with families as the most effective thing for Pacific students in the past 5 years. This included Pacific parent representation on the board, providing opportunities for Pacific families to provide feedback to the school through fono, and being aware of what was happening in the wider community.

Community connections, providing culturally connected opportunities to thrive as Pasifika learners.

We are well connected with their parents, they are well represented on our board, they see their culture as important at our school. We connect their culture to our religion.

Building strong connection with fanau and ensuring we are aware of cultural activities outside of school has grown engagement with school and staff. These tamariki are high attenders and have a strong desire to succeed.

## Other key areas of focus

Smaller numbers of principals mentioned the following ways they had focused on achieving equitable outcomes for Pacific students:

- connecting with other schools, including through Kāhui Ako with a focus on Pacific learners, or visiting schools with more Pacific students
- staffing decisions; for example, for a Pacific-focused role, or simply “attracting and retaining quality teachers”

- engaging with and listening to students through Pacific student groups and having Pacific student leaders
- bilingual and/or immersion classes: four schools had introduced or expanded opportunities for Pacific students to learn in a bilingual or immersion environment
- changing the school culture so “Pacific students see themselves in their school”.

### ***Students with additional learning support needs***

Five themes were revealed in analysis of responses (n = 160) about the most effective things schools had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for students with additional learning support needs.

#### **Increased staffing and support**

Many schools have heavily invested in employing additional staff to provide targeted and personalised support for students with additional needs. This includes employing “a full-time SENCO” and “board funded teacher aides”. Many schools have also invested in engaging with specialist staff in different areas; for example, “outreach, speech language, occupational therapy, counsellor etc.”. Schools emphasised a team-based approach to supporting students with additional learning needs.

Working as a team around the child including whānau, teachers, teacher aides, RTLB, MOE and other services.

#### **Strategic planning and data-driven decision making**

A recurring theme was the emphasis on strategic planning and data-driven approaches. Schools utilise data to inform their teaching methods and track progress. For example:

Responding to data and use of data to identify Tier 1–3 students and suitable programmes.

#### **Personalised and individualised learning**

Schools highlighted that a focus on individualised learning was a key aspect of the school’s strategy. This involved tailoring learning support to meet the specific needs of students and utilising personalised education plans such as Individualised Education Plans (IEP) and Individualised Learning Plans (ILP).

IEP and ILP process, funding and resources for ESOL learners, teacher aide support increase, PLD on neurodiverse learners, ICS and ORRs process.

Support for structured literacy had been introduced to accelerate learning for students with additional needs.

#### **Teacher development and professional learning**

There was a clear commitment to the ongoing development of staff to equip them with the skills necessary to support students effectively. PLD training on topics such as trauma-informed practices, dyslexia, cultural competency, inclusive practices, neurodiversity, and literacy had been a key component.

#### **Community and whānau engagement**

Engaging whānau and building strong relationships with them was consistently highlighted as an effective strategy. Regular communication with families ensured that students received consistent support both at school and at home.

It is worth noting that, while schools had made significant strides in providing additional support, there are challenges related to the sustainability of these efforts due to funding limitations. Several responses highlighted that, while the school has used self-funding and board funds to provide extra resources, the government funding for learning support is seen as inadequate. This issue is compounded by the increasing demand for services and the need to secure ongoing financial resources to maintain the support provided.

### ***Achieving equitable outcomes for students with complex social and emotional needs***

Most principals (n = 156) provided a response to the open-ended question, “What are the most effective things your school had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for students with complex social and emotional needs?” This high response rate reflects principals’ concerns (discussed in the Issues facing your school section) about supporting students with complex needs. Many principals mentioned more than one strategy or approach used at their school. A number of the strategies and approaches used overlapped with those mentioned above for supporting students with additional learning support needs.

#### **Supportive collaborations**

The main theme mentioned by around four-fifths of principals related to creating a network of supportive collaborations. Many schools had a range of these collaborations. Around one-third drew on in-school specialist staff to assist in supporting students. Most often mentioned were SENCO, RTLB, LSC, SWiS, and counsellors. Schools also made use of teacher aides for this purpose. Around one-fifth drew on external support from the Ministry of Education, specialist services such as psychologists, as well as a range of other providers. Some principals mentioned having an in-house team, wraparound support, or working closely with whānau and students.

Having a Social Worker and Counsellor employed. Pastoral Care team established.

#### **PLD and building capability**

The second most common theme, mentioned by around one-third of principals, related to the whole school or selected staff attending PLD in order to build their capacity to support students. The most common forms of PLD mentioned were sessions on key areas such as trauma-informed practice or autism, PB4L, and PLD provided through a Kāhui Ako or by Mana Ake.

PLD in Trauma-informed practice. We have opted into PB4L PLD and this has transformed the culture of our school and how we teach and reinforce our values!

#### **Planning and funding**

The third theme mentioned by around one-quarter of principals related to planning and funding. In terms of planning, some principals reported they had strategic, annual, or hauora/wellbeing plans and actions aimed at supporting students. Others noted their school used a personalised planning process to support students (e.g., IEPs or Individual Behaviour Plans).

Work with individual students to develop personalised plans that help them to manage their emotions.

The second aspect of this theme related to schools increasingly having to source extra funding to meet growing student needs. As one example, a number reported that the board had funded extra teacher aides to support students or had funded a social worker or part-time counsellor.

Self-fund additional support staff to cater for the wave of students who have presented with needs without funding attached. Including specific programs to support their social skills.

### Supportive teaching and learning

Creating a supportive teaching and learning environment was mentioned by around one-fifth of principals. One focus was building an inclusive and relationship-based school culture.

PHEW! Aroha, aroha, aroha, a school-wide village approach to supporting the child everywhere within the school.

A second aspect was offering students SEL or wellbeing-focused learning through the curriculum or for targeted groups. Examples included a values-based approach or the use of the Zones of Regulation or Mitey.

Employing a counsellor one day a week and focusing on explicit mental health teaching and learning through PBS [Positive Behaviour Supports/PB4L] and Mitey.

### School organisation and spaces

Around one-tenth of principals noted they had changed aspects of school systems to accommodate student needs. These changes included how they started the day or managed transitions, or lowering class sizes.

We have explored a variety of organisational aspects of our school to address their needs and also added in more funding than we get to provide that extra support for them in class and the playground, often sourcing and paying for expertise.

Within this theme, a number also reported they had developed a wellbeing or break-out room to provide a safe and quiet space for students if needed.

We have a learning assistant working with them, have developed a safe place for them to go to reset when about to blow or things are too much.

## Te toiora | Wellbeing

The wellbeing domain asked principals about their own wellbeing (e.g., stress, job satisfaction), as well as their school's approaches to supporting student wellbeing, and positive behaviour for learning. The final section in the domain focuses on access to and usefulness of wellbeing and behaviour support for schools. All of these have been the focus of questions in previous cycles of the national survey, allowing us to report on trends over time.

### Principal wellbeing

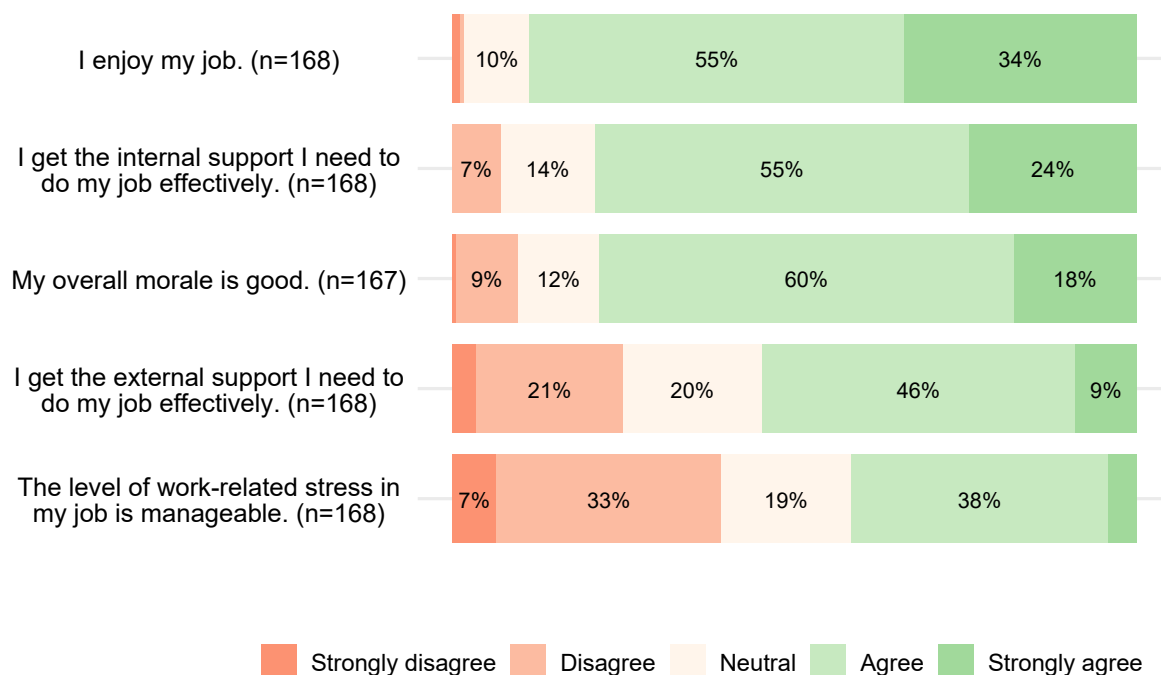
The NZCER national survey has asked principals about their job satisfaction, morale, and workload for a number of cycles.

#### ***Principals enjoyed their job but found their workload difficult to manage***

In 2024, most principals agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed their job (89%) and that their overall morale was good (78%, see Figure 31).

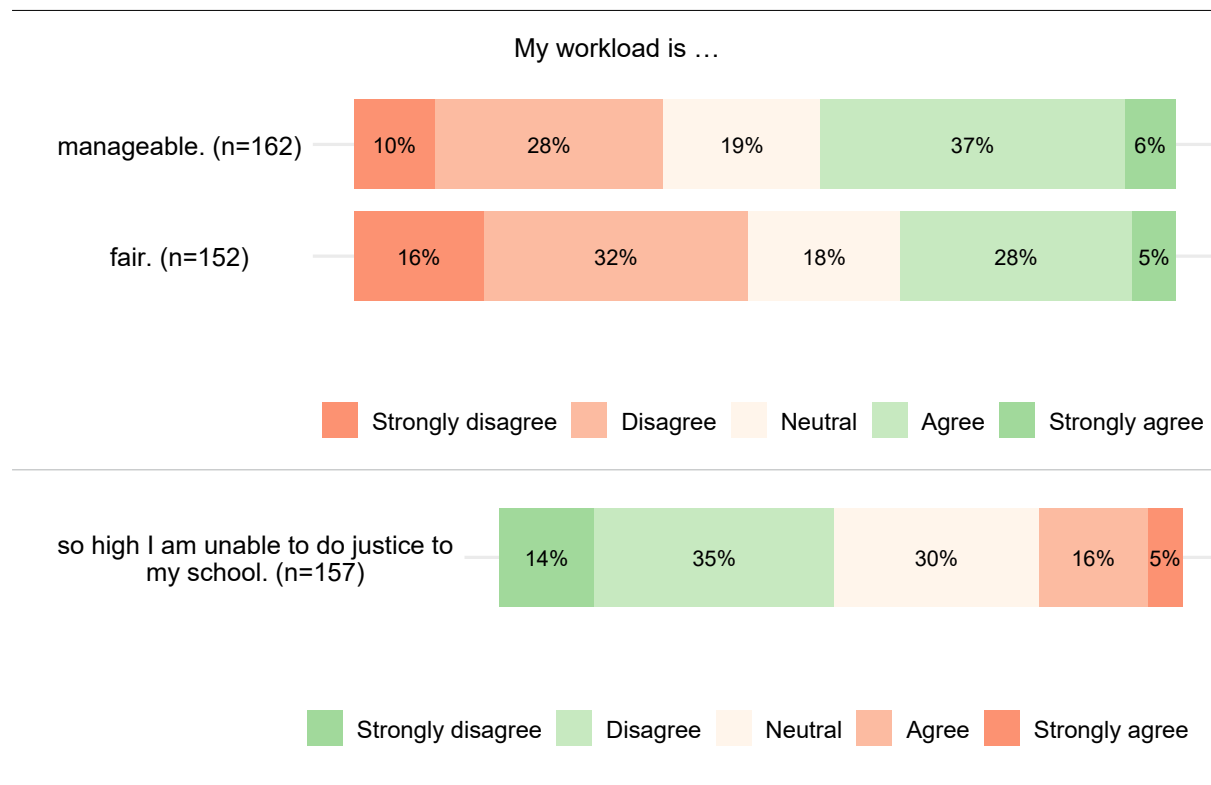
Most principals (79%) said they had the internal support they need to do their job effectively, while fewer (55%) thought the same about external support. Although most enjoyed their job, 40% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the level of work-related stress in their job was manageable.

FIGURE 31 Views of morale, stress, and job satisfaction



Looking more closely at workload, Figure 32 indicates that concerns about workload are ongoing, with only 43% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their workload is “manageable”. However, this is an improvement from the 2019 survey in which 29% thought the same. In 2024, only one-third (33%) agreed or strongly agreed that their workload is “fair”. Meanwhile, over one-fifth (21%) agreed or strongly agreed that their workload is “so high I am unable to do justice to my school”. These data suggest that at least one-fifth of principals have a concerning workload level that is impacting on their school.

FIGURE 32 Views of workload



### ***Principals' working hours were high and slowly increasing***

Table 7 shows that only 8% of principals can carry out their role in 50 hours a week or less, and this proportion is consistent since 2016. Most principals (71%) worked 56 or more hours a week. This number has been slowly creeping upwards from 66% in 2016 and 69% in 2019. Combined with the data about perceptions of workload from Figure 32, this indicates that principals have ongoing concerns about their workloads, work hours, and work stress.

TABLE 7 Principals' working hours per week

Hours per week	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n = 167)
41–50	9%	7%	8%
51–55	23%	22%	22%
56–60	30%	33%	34%
61–65	15%	14%	18%
66–70	13%	15 %	13%
71–80	5%	6%	4%
Over 81	3%	1%	2%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

## Student wellbeing

Since 2016, we have included a wider range of questions about student wellbeing in the national survey given increased understandings that a strong wellbeing foundation assists students to thrive at school and supports learning. Slight wording changes were made in the 2024 survey, but longitudinal comparisons are still possible.

Providing health and wellbeing support for students is a longstanding focus for primary schools, and most have a range of practices and initiatives in place to promote health and wellbeing. Since the 2019 national survey, the COVID pandemic and lockdowns enhanced or created new wellbeing challenges for schools and communities.

As reported earlier in the Issues facing your school section (Table 2), in 2024 the top two major issues facing schools were support for students with:

- complex learning, and social and emotional needs (82%)
- mental health or additional wellbeing needs (65%).<sup>46</sup>

### ***Around half of schools had well-embedded systems for identifying individual students with social or mental health needs***

In 2024, less than half (48%) of principals reported they had well-embedded systems for identifying individual students with social or mental health needs (Figure 33). This proportion is smaller than the 65% reported in 2019, and similar to the 44% reported in 2016.

Most schools had targeted emotional skills programmes for students with additional wellbeing needs that were partially or well embedded, an increase from 2019 (85% in 2024; 72% in 2019).

Fewer schools had partially or well-embedded approaches for other groups such as:

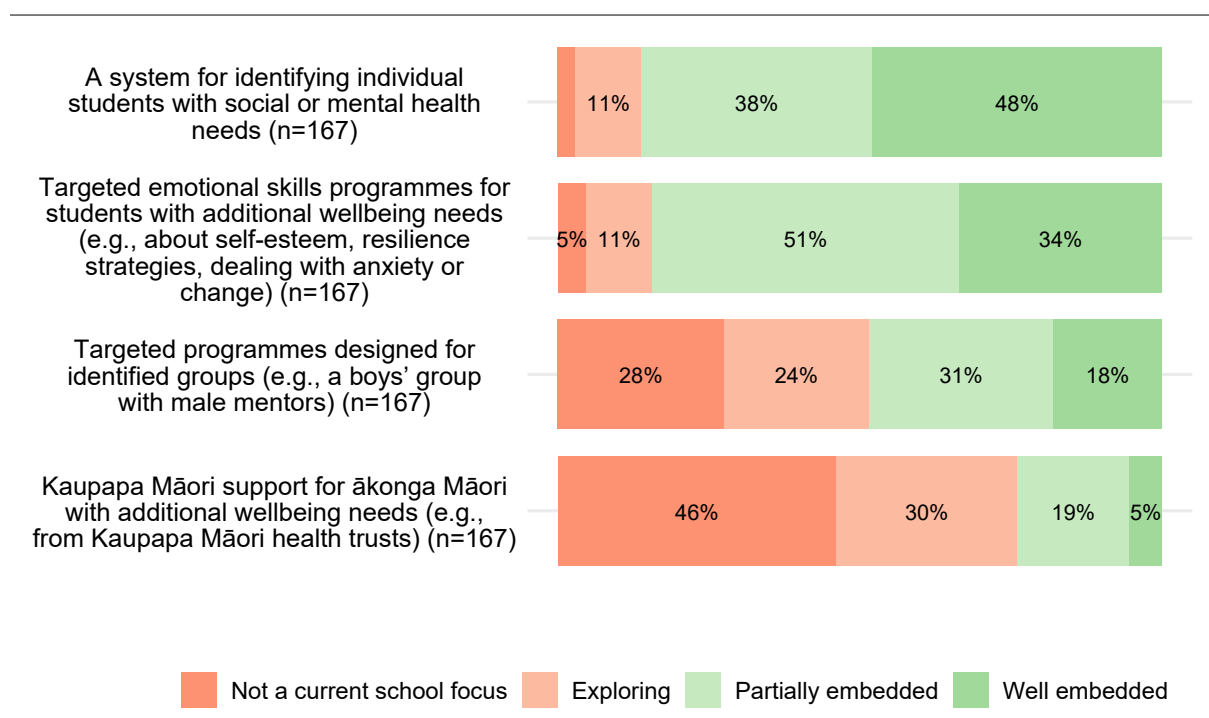
- targeted programmes for identified groups (49% in 2024; 51% in 2019)
- kaupapa Māori support for ākonga Māori with additional wellbeing needs (24% in 2024; 31% in 2019).

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<sup>46</sup> Principals from schools with more socioeconomic barriers tended to select this option more frequently, although this was not statistically significant.



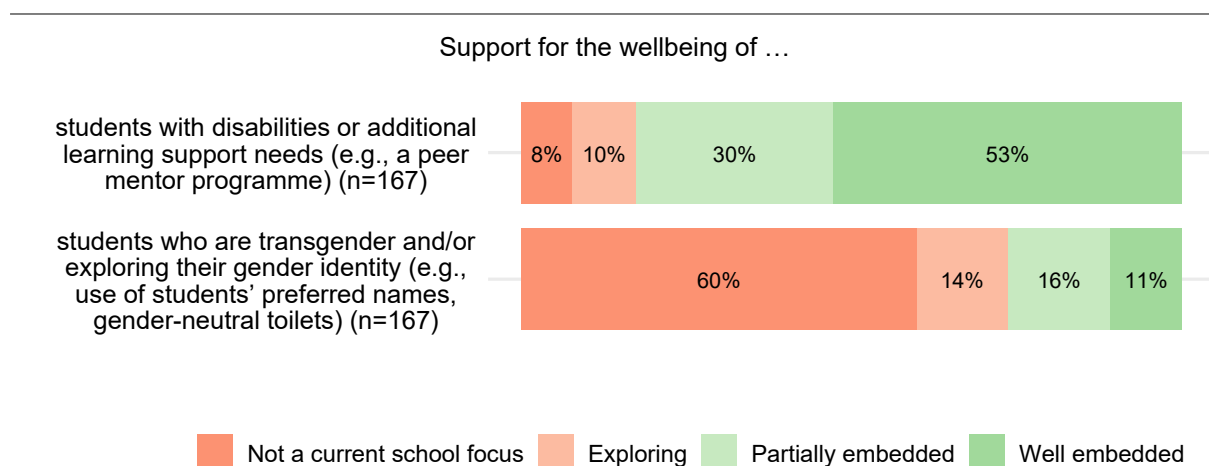
**FIGURE 33 The degree to which the approaches for assisting students who need extra wellbeing support are embedded in schools**



***Compared with 2019, fewer principals reported that they had well-embedded support for the wellbeing of students with disabilities or additional learning needs***

We asked two questions about support for groups of students who are known to experience discrimination at school (Figure 34). Around half (53%) of principals reported that support for the wellbeing of students with disabilities or additional learning support needs was well embedded, a decrease from 74% in 2019. In 2024, as in 2019, few schools had a focus on the wellbeing of students who are transgender and/or those exploring their gender identity. In 2024, these approaches were well embedded at only 11% of schools. These data suggest both these areas may need more system support.

**FIGURE 34 The degree to which the practices and programmes for supporting students' wellbeing are embedded in schools**



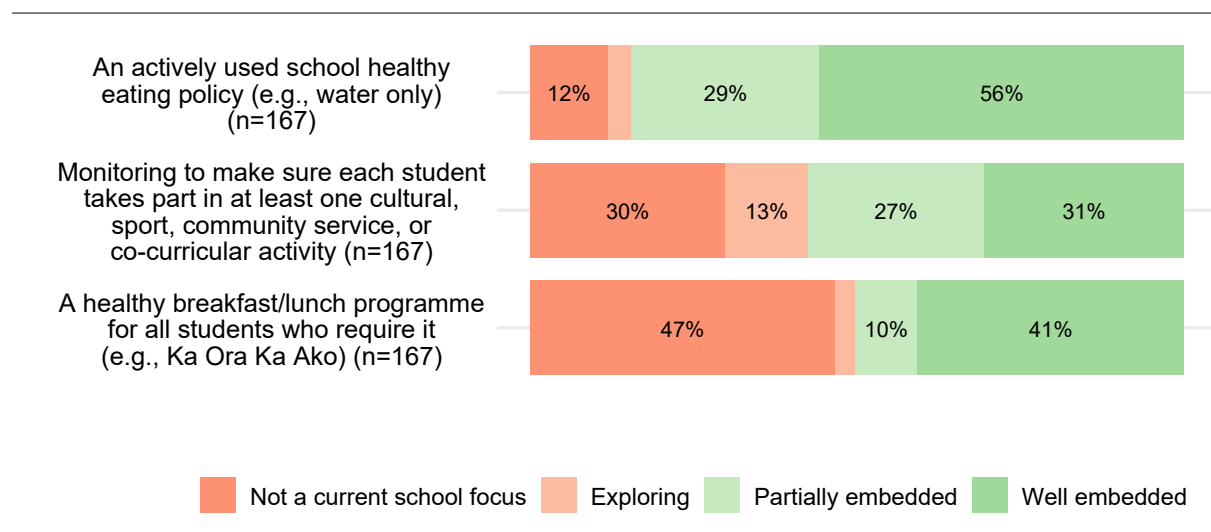
### ***Schools with more socioeconomic challenges were more likely to have a healthy breakfast/lunch programme for all students who required it***

In 2024, we included two items about healthy eating. Figure 35 shows that most schools (85%) had a partially or well-embedded healthy eating policy. The proportion of schools in which this policy was well embedded was similar in 2024 and 2019 (56% in 2024, 53% in 2019, and 37% in 2016).

Just over half (51%) of the principals had a partially or well-embedded “healthy breakfast/lunch programme for all students who require it”, a new item introduced in the 2024 survey. Of note is that schools with more socioeconomic challenges were statistically significantly more likely to rate this item as “partially” or “well embedded”.<sup>47</sup> Nearly all principals (90%) in schools with more socioeconomic barriers reported it as “well embedded”, with this figure dropping to 41% in schools with moderate barriers and 8% in schools with fewer barriers. Most schools with fewer socioeconomic challenges (85%) indicated that this was “not a current school focus”.

We also included an item about whether schools had “monitoring to make sure students take part in at least one cultural, sport, community service, or co-curricular activity”. The number of schools in which this practice was well embedded has stayed relatively similar over time (31% in 2024, and 26% in 2019).

**FIGURE 35 The degree to which the practices and programmes for supporting student wellbeing are embedded in schools**



### **Promoting positive behaviour to support learning**

Over time policy and practice has shifted towards wellbeing-focused approaches to student behaviour. A wellbeing-focused approach considers the motivations underlying behaviours and aims to deliberately model and teach positive behaviours in ways that are consistent and foster students' capabilities.

<sup>47</sup> The survey was completed prior to changes to the school lunch programme in 2025.

### ***Most schools had embedded approaches for promoting positive student behaviour***

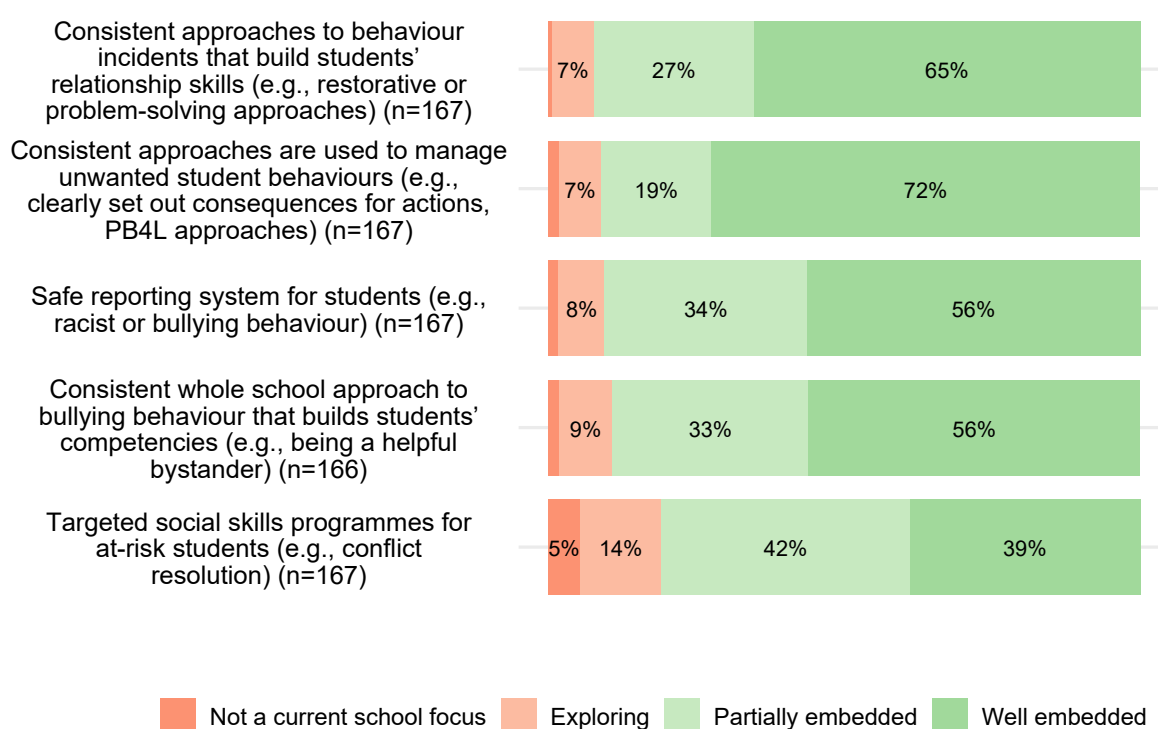
Figure 36 shows that most schools have either partially or well-embedded approaches for promoting positive student behaviour.

Most (72%) principals reported that “consistent approaches used to manage unwanted student behaviours” were well embedded in their schools, consistent with 76% in 2019.<sup>48</sup>

In 2024, some aspects of practice appeared less well embedded compared with 2019, including:

- consistent approaches to behaviour incidents that build students’ relationship skills (well embedded in 65% of schools in 2024, compared with 76% in 2019)
- safe reporting system for students (well embedded in 56% of schools in 2024, compared with 70% in 2019 and 57% in 2016).

**FIGURE 36 The degree to which the approaches for promoting positive student behaviour are embedded in schools**



### **Wellbeing and behaviour support for schools**

There are people, services, and organisations schools can draw on for support with student wellbeing and behaviour. We asked about nine of these, mostly government funded or provided. We sought to find out how useful various supports were if schools used them, and if they didn’t use them, why not.

<sup>48</sup> In 2019, this item read as “consistent approach to managing student behavioural responses across the school”.

***Services located at their school, or attached to a local cluster of schools, were more useful than those offered externally or to a wide range of schools***

Table 8 shows school use<sup>49</sup> of these support services. Use of services mostly reflects their availability. Sources of support that are available to most schools were the most used. The four most used supports were Resource Teachers Literacy and Behaviour (RTLb, 96%), Ministry of Education learning support (88%), attendance service (85%), and behaviour support services from the Ministry's regional offices (85%). Services that are funded for high-need schools only were used by fewer schools; for example, counselling in schools services (28%) and school-based social workers (e.g., SWiS, 32%).

**TABLE 8 School use of the services**

	<b>Schools that used the supports</b>	<b>Schools that didn't use the supports</b>
Resource Teachers Literacy and Behaviour (RTLb; n = 165)	159 (96%)	6 (4%)
Ministry of Education Learning Support (e.g., psychologist, speech language therapist; n = 167)	147 (88%)	20 (12%)
Attendance service (n = 167)	142 (85%)	25 (15%)
Behaviour support services from Ministry of Education regional offices (n = 165)	141 (85%)	24 (15%)
Oranga Tamariki social or youth worker (n = 165)	115 (70%)	50 (30%)
Health promoters from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or government agencies (e.g., Healthy Active Learning advisers from Regional Sports Trusts; n = 165)	113 (68%)	52 (32%)
Health professionals based at your school (e.g., school nurse, doctor; n = 166)	57 (34%)	109 (66%)
School-based social worker (e.g., SWiS; n = 167)	54 (32%)	113 (68%)
Counselling in schools services (n = 161)	45 (28%)	116 (72%)

Table 9 shows principals' views of the usefulness of these services, as proportions of the total who indicated that they used a particular service. Principals' ratings varied. Two services were rated as very useful by more than half the principals—school-based social workers (74%) and school-based health professionals (58%).

In general, principals tended to rate services that were located at their school, or attached to a local cluster of schools, as more useful than those offered externally or to a wide range of schools. This is likely to reflect the way that local services are easier to access (Education Review Office, 2024b) and more able to be tailored to particular student or school needs.

<sup>49</sup> School use is calculated based on principals' responses regarding the usefulness of the service. Schools that selected "not useful", "somewhat useful", or "very useful" are considered to be using the service, while schools that responded with "do not need this service" or "can't access this service" are considered not to be using it.

The least useful service was Oranga Tamariki social or youth workers<sup>50</sup> (17% of principals rated this service as very useful). These services from Oranga Tamariki have had low ratings in prior national surveys suggesting that the changes underway at Oranga Tamariki are yet to be experienced by schools. Around one-fifth of principals also rated the attendance service and behaviour support services from Ministry of Education regional offices as “not useful”.

TABLE 9 Schools that used supports: How useful were they?

	Not useful	Somewhat useful	Very useful
School-based social worker (e.g., SWiS; n = 54)	7%	19%	74%
Health professionals based at your school (e.g., school nurse, doctor; n = 57)	4%	39%	58%
Counselling in schools services (n = 45)	7%	47%	47%
RTLB (n = 159)	5%	49%	46%
Ministry of Education Learning Support (e.g., psychologist, speech language therapist; n = 147)	10%	48%	43%
Health promoters from NGOs or government agencies (e.g., Healthy Active Learning advisers from Regional Sports Trusts; n = 113)	9%	59%	32%
Attendance service (n = 142)	19%	49%	32%
Behaviour support services from Ministry of Education regional offices (n = 141)	17%	57%	26%
Oranga Tamariki social or youth worker (n = 115)	23%	60%	17%

### ***Lack of access was behind non-use of support services, rather than lack of need***

Table 10 puts another lens on these data, presenting the picture of schools that do not use these supports. Overall, principals' reasons for not using mental health/emotional wellbeing services are not a lack of need, but a lack of access. Among those not using these supports, most principals reported being unable to access them. For example:

- health professionals based at your school (94%, compared with only 6% indicating no need)
- counselling in schools services (90%, compared with only 10% indicating no need)
- Ministry of Education Learning Support (90% of the 20 principals who do not use this service reported a lack of access, but this is a small proportion of the total respondents to the survey)
- school-based social workers (89%, compared with 11% indicating no need).

As noted above, free access to these services is mostly targeted to higher-need schools, or secondary schools. These data suggest there is a need for wider access in primary schools.

50 Note SWiS is also an Oranga Tamariki programme but is more highly regarded than the social workers who deal with crises.

TABLE 10 Schools' reasons for not using supports

	Do not need this service	Can't access this service
Health professionals based at your school (e.g., school nurse, doctor) (n = 109)	6%	94%
Counselling in schools services (n = 116)	10%	90%
Ministry of Education Learning Support (e.g., psychologist, speech language therapist) (n = 20)	10%	90%
School-based social worker (e.g., SWiS; n = 113)	11%	89%
RTLB (n = 6)	33%	67%
Health promoters from NGOs or government agencies (e.g., Healthy Active Learning advisers from Regional Sports Trusts) (n = 52)	40%	60%
Oranga Tamariki social or youth worker (n = 50)	54%	46%
Behaviour support services from Ministry of Education regional offices (n = 24)	58%	42%
Attendance service (n = 25)	80%	20%

## Principals' working experiences and future plans

The findings for all six survey domains have been presented in the previous sections. In this final section of Findings, we focus on principals' individual working experiences, including how long they have been a principal, what they would like to change about their work, and their career plans for the next 5 years.

### What principals would like to change

We asked principals the main things they would like to change about their work as a principal (principals could select more than one option). This is a longstanding question in the national survey.

#### ***Principals continued to want more time for educational leadership, reflection, reading, and innovation***

Consistent with the feedback on principals' workload and concerns about its manageability and sustainability, Table 11 shows that principals continue to have a need for more time for the core of their work—educational leadership (77%)—as well as for reflection, reading, and innovation (77%). This finding has been very consistent since 2016.

The desire for a reduction in the property management/development demands of their role has increased, reaching 57% in 2024, up from 46% in 2019 and 45% in 2016. There is also a growing desire for consistent advice from the Ministry of Education, ERO, and the Teaching Council (55%, up from 43% in 2019). Similarly, the desire to reduce the demands and expectations from external agencies has risen to 51%, up from 38% in 2019 and 31% in 2016.

In contrast, the desire to reduce administration and paperwork has decreased, dropping from over 60% in both 2016 and 2019 to 52% in 2024. There was also a slight decrease in the desire for a more balanced life (from 59% in 2019 to 55% in 2024) and for more professional dialogue about their work (from 37% in 2019 to 32% in 2024).

A few principals (18%, n = 30) shared comments on other desired changes to their work, with more funding, support, and resources being a key theme, which, while more relevant to school management, also directly impacts principals' work and their experience. Examples included:

Better resourcing for children with additional needs—too many have no funding whatsoever so we are having to provide it ourselves which is unsustainable; smaller classes to accommodate the many children with high needs would help my teachers and therefore help me.

I've spent a lot of time trying to find money to pay for essentials. Teacher aides for high needs students, financially managing the school has been a massive drain this year. You have to jump through so many hoops to get money that should just come.

Another theme was the need for role balance. One principal noted the challenge for principals of very small schools.

As a small school, I am both principal and classroom teacher—I cannot do either justice.

TABLE 11 Things principals would like to change about their work

	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n = 165)
More time to focus on educational leadership	75%	79%	77%
More time to reflect/read/be innovative	78%	74%	77%
Reduce demands of property management/development on me <sup>51</sup>	45%	46%	57%
Have a more balanced life	54%	59%	55%
Get consistent advice from Ministry of Education, ERO, and Teaching Council <sup>52</sup>	(29%)	43%	55%
Reduce administration/paperwork	64%	66%	52%
Reduce external agencies' demands/expectations	31%	38%	51%
Have more professional dialogue about my work <sup>53</sup>	29%	37%	32%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

## Plans for the next 5 years

We also have longitudinal data about principals' plans for the next 5 years.

***Many principals planned to stay in their current role, with fewer planning to lead another school but more considering a career outside education than 2019***

Where do principals see themselves in the next 5 years? As shown in Table 12, many principals (60%) plan to remain as principal at their current school, a slight increase from 55% in 2019 and consistent with 2016. Around one-third (32%) intend to apply for a study award/sabbatical/ fellowship, similar to previous years. Twenty percent plan to retire, consistent with previous cycles. Unsurprisingly, the retirement plan is statistically significantly related to principals' years of experiences, with over half (52%) of those planning to retire having more than 15 years' experience.

<sup>51</sup> This item read "reduce demands of property management" in previous survey rounds.

<sup>52</sup> In 2019, this item read "get advice from Ministry of Education, ERO, and Teaching Council that is aligned". In 2016, this item about alignment covered the Ministry of Education and ERO, and 29% of principals selected it.

<sup>53</sup> This item read "more professional dialogue about my work" in previous survey rounds.

A notable shift is the decrease in the proportion of principals planning to lead another school, dropping from 32% in 2016 and 33% in 2019 to only 18% in 2024. In contrast, the proportion of principals who plan to leave teaching or change to a career outside education has increased, up from 8% in both 2016 and 2019 to 14% in 2024. Meanwhile, 17% of principals indicated that they plan to change to a different role within education, a figure consistent with 2019 but an increase from 2016.

In addition, eight principals provided comments under the “other” option, including pursuing overseas opportunities (e.g., “return overseas to an international school”) and seeking research experiences (e.g., “I would love to broaden my educational leadership lens and spend a year researching”).

TABLE 12 **Where principals see themselves in the next 5 years**

	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n = 164)
Continue as principal of this school	60%	55%	60%
Apply for a study award/sabbatical/fellowship	37%	33%	32%
Retire	23%	23%	20%
Lead another school	32%	33%	18%
Change to a different role within education (e.g., with a government agency, consultant)	8%	17%	17%
Leave teaching or change to a career outside education <sup>54</sup>	8%	8%	14%
Not sure	14%	15%	12%
Other	7%	10%	5%
Return to classroom teaching	6%	5%	4%

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

## Length of time as a principal

### *The proportion of principals who have been a principal for over 15 years has declined*

Table 13 shows respondents' years of experience as principals, comparing the 2024 data with the 2019 and 2016 survey cycles. Although the overall picture remains similar, the 2024 data show an increase of principals at a mid-career stage (6–10 years as a principal), and a smaller proportion of principals who have been a principal for over 15 years or for 3–5 years, compared with 2019.

54 In 2019, this item read as “retrain/change to a different career”.



TABLE 13 Years of experience as a principal

Years of experience	2016 (n = 200)	2019 (n = 145)	2024 (n = 165)
Less than 3 years	18%	20%	20%
3–5 years	12%	20%	15%
6–10 years	21%	19%	28%
11–15 years	19%	14%	15%
More than 15 years	31%	26%	22%

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

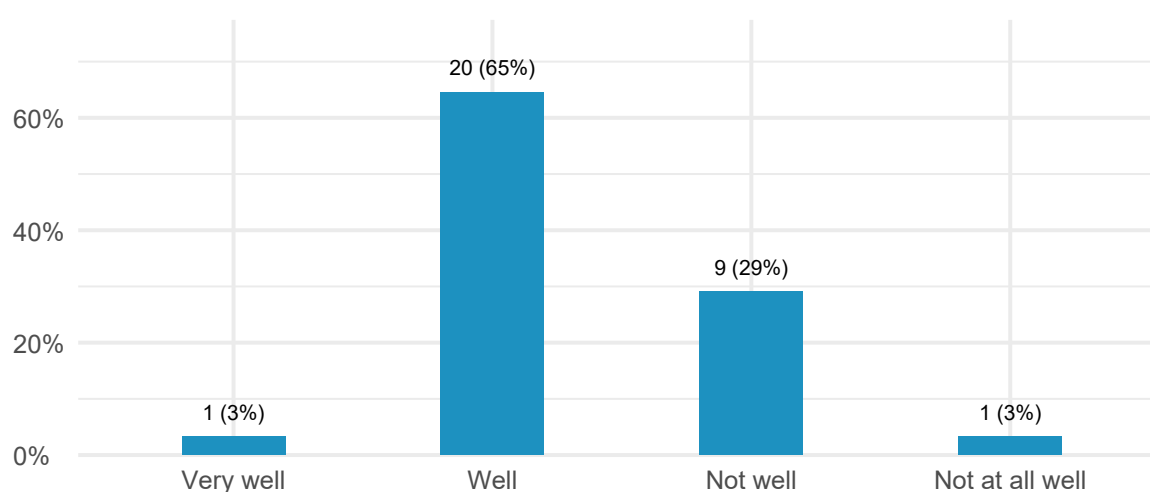
### Preparation for principalship

In the 2024 survey, principals with less than 3 years' experience were asked about how well prepared they felt for their first principalship (Figure 37). This question was asked for all respondents in the 2019 survey.

#### *Two-thirds of principals with less than 3 years' experience felt well prepared for their first principalship*

Of the 31 new principals (with less than 3 years' experience), 65% felt well prepared (just one felt very well prepared), while 29% indicated they did not feel well prepared and just one principal felt “not at all well” prepared. This picture can be considered alongside our earlier finding that these new principals were more likely to want PLD for themselves on “learning to lead as a first-time principal” and “strategic planning and implementation” (see Accessing external expertise and PLD section under Support and resourcing domain).

FIGURE 37 New principals' view of their preparation for first principalship (n = 31)



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## 4. He matapaki | Discussion

This final section aims to draw together the main findings from all survey domains and describe and discuss how the 2024 national surveys continue to monitor educational trends and policy impacts in Aotearoa New Zealand over time, by addressing the following research questions:

- Question 1: To what extent and in what ways is the system honouring and enacting with Te Tiriti o Waitangi? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 2: To what extent and in what ways is the system serving ākonga Māori? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 3: To what extent and in what ways is the system serving Pacific students? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 4: To what extent and in what ways is the system designed and supported to achieve equitable outcomes for all students? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?
- Question 5: To what extent and in what ways are all people in the system supported to succeed? What are the effects of key policy changes? Where are the strengths and areas for improvement?

### Honouring and enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi

In response to research question 1, the extent to which the education system honours and enacts Te Tiriti o Waitangi remains a critical area. While there have been positive efforts to integrate Te Tiriti principles into policy and practice, there are still areas where the system falls short. Key policy changes, such as the introduction of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories, have had positive effects in some schools. However, challenges remain in fully embedding these practices across all schools and ensuring that they meet the specific needs of ākonga Māori. Strengths lie in the growing recognition of Māori culture, values, and language, but more consistent and widespread application is needed to fully honour the principles of Te Tiriti.

#### **Strong commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi is evident, but deeper change is uneven**

The 2024 survey suggests a strong self-reported commitment among principals to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, with 97% agreeing it is enacted through school values and daily practices. While this signals widespread intent, it also invites reflection on how consistently and meaningfully this commitment is being realised in practice, and whether it reflects surface-level alignment or deeper, systemic change.

The open-text responses (see the Improving equity section under the Inclusion domain) provide a clearer view into what this enactment looks like in practice. Embedding tikanga, te reo, and te ao Māori values was a common focus across responses, with principals describing efforts that extended beyond classroom instruction to influence school culture, daily routines, and broader identity. These initiatives demonstrate a commitment to cultural responsiveness and represent ongoing efforts to

embed more culturally sustaining practices. This work also serves to affirm the identities of ākonga Māori, reflected in practices such as the use of tuakana-teina approaches, availability of co-curricular activities, and the introduction of whānau classes. These efforts contribute to the normalisation of Māori values in everyday school life and foster environments where ākonga Māori feel seen, valued, and culturally safe. However, despite strong examples in some schools, comparisons with the 2019 survey indicate a decline in the proportion of principals reporting these practices as embedded. The decreased trend across years highlights the further need for continued support to ensure these practices are sustained and deepened across the system.

### **Local relationships appear to be driving change, yet broader partnerships remain limited**

Where progress is occurring, it appears to be largely driven at the school and community level, underscoring the central role of local relationships in enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This emphasis on local relationships is reflected in increased engagement with hapū and iwi. In 2019, 60% of principals reported engaging with local hapū or iwi; by 2024, this had increased to 77%. Recent policy developments, including the introduction of Aotearoa New Zealand's histories and the requirements under Section 127(1)(d) of the Education and Training Act 2020, may be playing a role in deepening this engagement, with over 40% of schools reporting hapū and iwi involvement in curriculum planning. This highlights how system-level levers can help create opportunities for more authentic partnership.

While this is a meaningful shift, other forms of deeper, sustained involvement remain less common. Only around a quarter of principals reported involving hapū or iwi in areas like governance, data use, or teaching and learning, indicating areas where partnerships could be strengthened. Encouragingly, around half of principals expressed a desire to build their capabilities in this area, suggesting both a recognition of the importance of these relationships and a willingness to further strengthening them.

Overall, the findings reflect a sector moving in a positive direction. Embedding Māori worldviews, building genuine relationships with mana whenua, and creating environments where ākonga Māori see themselves, their language, and their culture reflected and valued were recurring priorities across responses. Continued progress will rely on supporting schools to move from symbolic practice to deeper structural change, and from isolated efforts to sustained, reciprocal partnerships with whānau, hapū, and iwi.

## **Challenges in serving ākonga Māori**

In response to research question 2, we explore how effectively the education system is serving ākonga Māori. This section will highlight both the strengths of the current system and areas where improvements are needed to better support ākonga Māori. By examining the various dimensions of the system, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of its alignment with the unique needs of ākonga Māori in today's educational landscape.

### **Gaps exist in reo Māori learning, teacher shortages, and deep whānau engagement**

Efforts to better serve ākonga Māori are evident across schools, but considerable challenges remain, particularly in access to reo Māori immersion education and the availability of qualified kaiako/teachers. Most schools (81%) do not offer bilingual or immersion learning at Levels 1 or 2, indicating limited opportunities for ākonga to learn in a reo Māori setting. While 19% of principals reported

their schools provide these opportunities, one in three of these schools reported they were unable to accommodate all applicants. This highlights an ongoing gap in provision across the schools surveyed.

A key barrier is the difficulty in recruiting kaiako/teachers to teach te reo Māori, with 70% of principals reporting challenges. Shortages were reported across all levels of provision but were most acute for teaching te reo Māori as a separate subject, rather than within immersion settings. This may indicate a broader systemic issue in the supply of trained educators with the proficiency and confidence to deliver te reo Māori in English-medium education settings.

Between 2019 and 2023, only 120–180 teachers graduated with bilingual or immersion teaching qualifications, and just 20–35 completed specialist te reo Māori teaching qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2024b). These figures reflect completions rather than registrations, meaning the actual pool of available kaiako/teachers is likely smaller. Additional factors, such as kaiako choosing to work in kaupapa Māori education settings or secondary schools, may further reduce availability in primary education settings. Addressing this shortfall is critical to expanding reo Māori access for ākonga Māori in English-medium education.

Additionally, while most schools continue to report having a Māori language plan, there has been a decline in strong agreement and a rise in disagreement about whether a plan was in place. These findings suggest some schools lack a structured or well-defined approach. A well-developed plan is crucial for sustaining and strengthening te reo Māori in schools, and the findings indicate schools may need further guidance, resourcing, and support to develop, implement, and maintain these plans effectively (Hunia et al., 2018; Ministry of Education, 2020).

Whānau engagement in reo Māori education also presents an area for improvement for schools. Compared with 2019, while a larger proportion of principals in 2024 reported keeping whānau informed about how ākonga are supported in speaking te reo Māori, there is a decline in the proportion of principals involving whānau in Māori language planning and delivery. Given the critical role of intergenerational transmission in sustaining te reo Māori, strengthening whānau engagement remains essential. Ensuring whānau feel included, informed, and empowered in decision-making processes helps foster stronger shared ownership of reo Māori learning (Education Review Office, 2020; Taani, 2019). Schools may benefit from more deliberate and collaborative approaches that involve whānau, hapū, and iwi in shaping Māori language education, grounded in the principles of manaakitanga and mutual reciprocity.

## **Identity-affirming practices are valued, but not consistently embedded**

Despite strong examples in some schools, the decline since 2019 in principals reporting that identity-affirming practices are well or partially embedded suggests progress has not been consistent across the sector. Approaches to affirming the identities of ākonga Māori included embedding tikanga and te reo Māori into schoolwide practice, access to co-curricular activities such as kapa haka, tuakana-teina approaches, and whānau classes. However, when compared with 2019, there has been a decline in most areas, with access to co-curricular activities the only approach to remain stable. These findings suggest that, while schools value culturally sustaining practices, embedding them more widely and consistently may require renewed attention and support. Ongoing investment in teacher capability, consistent policy settings, access to high-quality te reo Māori professional development, and strengthened partnerships with whānau, hapū, and iwi will be critical to ensure schools can support ākonga Māori in ways that reflect their language, identity, and aspirations.

## Room for improvement in serving Pacific students

Pacific students make up 13.5% of Years 1–8 students. This broad grouping encompasses students from Samoa, Tonga, the Cook Islands, Tuvalu, Tokelau, Niue, Fiji, and other Pacific Island cultures, most born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Students from these distinct cultures and languages tend to be clustered in areas and therefore in schools. One-fifth of principals in the 2024 survey indicated that their school does not currently have students from Pacific cultures, and other schools will have few Pacific students.

A focus on equity underpins our interest in putting a lens on to what extent and in what ways the education system is serving Pacific students (research question 3). The 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education recognises that:

Evidence suggests that Pacific learners thrive in learning environments with lots of opportunities for collaborative learning where identities, languages and cultures are valued and educationally powerful connections with families and communities are made. (Ministry of Education, 2024a)

### Some schools are very focused on the needs of their Pacific students

Positively, the majority of schools (60%) are either exploring or have embedded the incorporation of Pacific cultural values, identities, and languages into schoolwide practices. The Ministry of Education recognises that “there are pockets of good practice in the education system for Pacific learners and families” (Ministry of Education, 2024a). Our national survey supports this, finding that some schools are very focused on the needs of their Pacific students. To achieve equitable outcomes, these schools use evidence-based culturally responsive pedagogies, prioritise relevant PLD, celebrate Pacific cultures, and build strong relationships with Pacific families and communities through celebrations, Pacific parent representation on the board, providing opportunities for Pacific families to provide feedback to the school through fono.

Ten percent of schools have bilingual or immersion learning environments in a Pacific language or are exploring them. One of the five system shifts in the 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education is to “work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs, including growing and supporting Pacific bilingual and immersion education pathways” (Ministry of Education, 2024a). The provision of bilingual or immersion learning environments in a Pacific language is a new question in the national survey and can be tracked in the future.

### Compared with 2019, schools are less likely to have embedded approaches that affirm Pacific students’ identities

However, the 2024 data show no improvement for any items focused on Pacific students or their families compared with 2019. Fewer schools include strategies for engaging with Pacific families in their strategic plan. Of even more concern is that schools are less likely than in 2019 to have embedded approaches that affirm Pacific students’ identities. Fewer than half of principals answered the question about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 5 years to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific students. This could suggest that principals have more immediate and urgent demands that may have taken the focus off Pacific students.

There is not a strong call for support and access to external expertise. Nearly half (49%) of principals consider they don’t need external expertise to implement reliable strategies to support Pacific student learning. One-quarter (24%) have the external expertise they need, leaving 28% who need this expertise to implement reliable strategies to support Pacific student learning but can’t access it. This was an unmet need for a similar proportion of schools in 2019.

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The 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education (Ministry of Education, 2024a) identifies five key system shifts, and the actions government is taking to achieve them. It also outlines how early learning services, schools, and tertiary providers can achieve change for Pacific learners and their families. Two of these shifts in particular fall within the scope of the questions asked in the national survey, allowing us to contribute to the evidence base about progress towards these shifts, now and in the future.

- Enable every teacher, leader, and educational professional to take co-ordinated action to become culturally competent with diverse Pacific learners.
- Partner with families to design education opportunities together with teachers, leaders, and educational professionals so aspirations for learning and employment can be met.

In this 2024 survey, we expanded the number of items to provide a more comprehensive picture to enable us to understand to what extent and in what ways the system is serving Pacific students. The 2024 teacher survey findings will add to this picture. It is positive that the majority of schools are working on the visibility of Pacific cultures within their school environments and practices. But there is room for improvement in the extent of schools' use of approaches that affirm Pacific students' identities and interactions with Pacific families and community leaders.

## **Continued efforts needed to achieve equitable outcomes for all students**

This section explores the ongoing efforts required to achieve equitable outcomes for all students (research question 4), particularly in light of the transition from the decile rating system to the EQI system, which is a key lever for achieving equitable outcomes for all students. Overall, principals gave a mixed response on whether the EQI system results in more accurate targeting of resourcing. This section further highlights the growing need for increased access to student wellbeing services and the importance of embedding supportive practices for students facing mental health challenges, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we delve into these issues, we explore the complexities of achieving equitable educational outcomes and the support required to meet the diverse needs of all students.

### **Principals in schools facing greater socioeconomic challenges are more likely to report benefits from the EQI, but these schools still face more challenges**

We tested for statistically significant associations between schools' EQI and principals' responses to all closed questions. This analysis gives us a lens on whether the system is supporting equitable outcomes for all students. Positively, principals in schools facing greater socioeconomic challenges were more likely to report benefits from the shift to the EQI system. This contributes to understanding whether the EQI system with its more fine-grained calculation than the decile approach is indeed more equitable. Schools with more socioeconomic challenges were significantly more likely to have "a healthy breakfast/lunch programme for all students who require it". The Government's targeted Ka Ora, Ka Ako Healthy Lunches Programme aims to "provide a daily nutritious lunch to students in need of the greatest support to help them learn and thrive at school or kura".<sup>55</sup> Nearly all principals in schools with more socioeconomic barriers reported that a programme such as Ka Ora Ka Ako was "well embedded".

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55 <https://kaorakaako.education.govt.nz/working-together/new-model/frequently-asked-questions>

However, principals from schools facing greater socioeconomic challenges were more likely to report challenges in three areas: recruiting quality teachers; improving student attendance; and student access to digital technology at home. Principals in schools facing more socioeconomic challenges were also more likely to identify a need for PLD as a first-time principal.

### **There is a pressing need for wider access to services that support student wellbeing**

Since 2016, we have included a wider range of questions about student wellbeing in the national survey given increased understandings that a strong wellbeing foundation assists students to thrive at school and supports learning. Providing health and wellbeing support for students is a longstanding focus for primary schools, and most have a range of practices and initiatives in place to promote health and wellbeing. Since the 2019 national survey, the COVID pandemic and lockdowns enhanced or created new wellbeing challenges for schools and communities. Students' need for wellbeing and mental health support is growing (Education Review Office, 2024b; Sutcliffe et al., 2023).

Our findings suggest there is a pressing need for wider access to wellbeing-related services. In 2024, the top two major issues principals said were facing their school were both related to students' social and emotional wellbeing (including mental health). The number of principals reporting an unmet need for external expertise to work with students with mental health needs has grown since 2016. Principals report they lack, but want, better access to wellbeing-related services. Currently, free access to some of these services is mostly targeted to higher need schools or secondary schools (e.g., Counselling in schools, SWiS, and school health services).

Between 2016 and 2019, there had been increases in schools' use of wellbeing-focused practices such as systems for identifying individual students with social or mental health needs, targeted programmes for identified groups, and kaupapa Māori support for ākonga Māori with additional wellbeing needs, but the 2024 data show that these are now less well embedded. These survey results raise some equity concerns for groups of students who are known to experience discrimination at school. It appears schools may require more support to fully embed wellbeing policies and practices aimed at ākonga Māori, students with disabilities or additional learning support needs, and students who are transgender and/or exploring their gender identity.

There are likely to be a few factors that are influencing these patterns. The post-COVID impact of greater wellbeing challenges and higher levels of student need has made it harder for principals to access the support that is needed to build and embed practices. At the same time, the current focus on attendance, and literacy and numeracy achievement and assessment, may be resulting in less attention on student wellbeing and PLD relating to wellbeing.

### **Building on strengths to support all people in the system to succeed**

In response to research question 5, the 2024 national survey of primary schools provides a lens on how the education system ensures that all individuals—whether students and their whānau, teachers, and school leaders are provided with the support they need to succeed in an equitable and sustainable way, while also examining the impact of key policy changes. At its core, the question of how the education system supports “all people” can be understood as how effectively it provides the structures, resources, and guidance necessary for success across these diverse groups.

While the sections above discuss how students, along with their whānau, are supported, and the teacher survey report addresses the support teachers receive, this section focuses on how the system supports principals in their leadership roles, offering valuable insights that complement the findings from the teacher survey.

### **Principals are progressing in their leadership roles but face ongoing challenges, calling for targeted support**

Overall, the 2024 survey findings suggest that the education system has made notable progress but still faces ongoing challenges. Principals, as central figures in driving change and maintaining school operations, were found to be navigating a constantly shifting landscape. Despite being provided with professional development and leadership resources, principals continue to face considerable pressure, particularly when it comes to managing the demands of policy changes and supporting the diverse needs of their schools.

This year, the survey introduced questions specifically focusing on the individual needs of principals, acknowledging the importance of listening to them as individuals, in addition to their leadership roles. The findings revealed that principals require targeted PLD in areas such as AI in education, working with local hapū and/or iwi, and leadership development (e.g., leading engagement with parents, whānau, and communities), offering clearer direction for how they can be better supported. The survey results also suggested that a critical gap remains in support for principals' mental health and wellbeing. The growing demands placed on principals, with limited time for reflection and leadership development, are a key concern that continues to impact their effectiveness and working experiences. While most principals plan to remain in their current roles, there is a growing trend of those considering a career outside of education, which speaks to the need for sustainable support systems that prioritise their wellbeing and professional growth.

In addition, principals continued to grapple with insufficient resources; for example, a particular concern around unmet property needs that are having a negative impact on both teachers and students. Insufficient school facilities and infrastructure are a significant barrier to providing a conducive learning environment. Taken as a group, principals have mixed views about the EQI system. As suggested by the survey findings, while the EQI system has the potential to better target resources to mitigate the impact of socioeconomic barriers, the practical application is still a work in progress, with many principals struggling to fully leverage the changes. This highlights the need for further support to help school leaders effectively understand and navigate the new system.

Another significant challenge highlighted across the survey was the growing tension between the lack of support and the rising demands of addressing students with complex learning, social, and emotional needs. This challenge is compounded by the increasing needs for external expertise, particularly in areas such as mental health, trauma, and differentiated teaching. Principals reported their struggles to access these crucial resources, underscoring a pressing need for more accessible support.

### **Principals showed strong support for the direction of the updated curriculum and recent changes, valuing external support and leadership development**

Despite the ongoing challenges schools face, there are several strengths that have emerged, signalling progress and areas of optimism for the future.



Principals generally expressed positive views on the advice and support they receive from education agencies and organisations, and collaboration between schools has proven effective in fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility.

Further reinforcing the positive momentum is the strong support principals have shown for the direction of the updated New Zealand Curriculum. As shown in the 2024 survey, a majority of the principals believed it was a step in the right direction to better equip students for the future. However, there were concerns about the pace of implementation, suggesting that a more gradual rollout would help ensure lasting improvements in classrooms while ensuring the wellbeing of school leaders and teachers. Furthermore, principals are also largely optimistic that their students will benefit from the changes to the English and Mathematics and Statistics learning areas, which were designed to better equip students for the future.

Another strength highlighted by the survey findings is a decrease in principals identifying major issues facing their schools, such as concerns about excessive demands, funding, staffing, and property, compared with 2019. The top issues now are supporting students with complex learning and emotional needs and mental health or wellbeing. While challenges like recruiting quality teachers and maintaining digital infrastructure remain, their prominence has decreased, reflecting some improvements in key areas since 2019.

Furthermore, the survey also shows the effectiveness of leadership development programmes for new principals. Two-thirds of new principals reported feeling well prepared for their first principalship, which is an indication that mentorship programmes and leadership development initiatives are in place. This aspect of preparation is crucial, as it ensures that new principals can step into their roles with the tools and knowledge to lead schools effectively, while also providing them with the confidence and support needed to navigate the challenges of school leadership. However, our results also show that one-third of new principals felt unprepared, with a greater need for PLD for first-time principals in schools facing higher socioeconomic challenges, indicating a need for further exploration into how to provide more targeted support and PLD for these first-time principals.

### **The path forward: From strength to strength**

In sum, while challenges remain, the survey reveals a robust foundation of strengths within the education system that are supporting the success of all stakeholders. Principals' positive views on support, collaboration, and leadership preparation suggest that there is a growing sense of empowerment among school leaders.

However, the feedback also points to areas for growth, particularly in resource availability, and adjusting the pace of educational changes to ensure that they are sustainable and impactful in the long term. Addressing these gaps—through more targeted and accessible PLD for school leaders, better access to external support, and a more thoughtful approach to implementing key policy changes—will be critical to building on current strengths and ensuring that the education system becomes more equitable and supportive for everyone involved.

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## He āpitahanga | Appendices

## APPENDIX A: Survey framework

FIGURE 38 An overview of the new national survey framework

NZCER National Survey framework							
National Surveys monitor educational trends and policy impacts in Aotearoa New Zealand over time							
	Teaching & Learning	Curriculum & Assessment	Inclusion	Wellbeing	Support & Resourcing	Collaborative relationships	Governance
				Equity			
				Te Tiriti o Waitangi			
				Pacific Education			
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culturally sustaining pedagogies</li><li>• Learning opportunities</li><li>• Progress and achievement</li><li>• Grouping practices</li><li>• Social and emotional learning</li><li>• Use of AI</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experiences of specific areas of interest in each survey cycle (e.g., policy changes)</li><li>• Local curriculum</li><li>• Assessment to improve teaching and learning</li><li>• Impact of NCEA changes</li><li>• Te Mātaiaho: the refreshed New Zealand Curriculum</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Classroom and school culture</li><li>• Belonging</li><li>• Learning support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bullying</li><li>• Racism</li><li>• Discrimination</li><li>• Mental health and wellbeing</li><li>• Aspirations and hope</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to learning support</li></ul>	Transition between schools	
Parents and whānau	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culturally sustaining pedagogies</li><li>• Learning opportunities</li><li>• Progress and achievement</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support for learners with disabilities and/or learning support needs</li><li>• Support for learners who are gifted and talented</li><li>• Support for English language learners</li><li>• Inclusive school practices</li><li>• Classroom and school culture</li><li>• Belonging</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to learning support</li><li>• Barrier-free access</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transitions</li><li>• Quality interactions with child’s teachers</li></ul>	Engagement with School Boards
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culturally sustaining pedagogies</li><li>• Teaching English language learners</li><li>• Teaching diverse students</li><li>• Teaching literacy (e.g., structured literacy approach)</li><li>• Specific areas (e.g., Social and emotional learning, climate change)</li><li>• Use of AI</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge and resources to support inclusive practices</li><li>• Support for learners with disabilities and/or learning support needs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workload</li><li>• Morale/job satisfaction</li><li>• Mental health and wellbeing</li><li>• School culture</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional learning and development (PLD)</li><li>• Support for learning te reo Māori</li><li>• Digital technologies and AI</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections with other teachers</li><li>• Relationships with parents and families, whānau Māori, Pacific families</li></ul>	
Principals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leading learning</li><li>• Using evidence to improve teaching and learning</li><li>• Teaching languages other than English</li></ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School culture</li><li>• School-wide approaches</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• School-wide approaches to promoting positive behaviour, student mental health and wellbeing</li><li>• Workload</li><li>• Morale/job satisfaction</li><li>• Mental health and wellbeing</li><li>• Support for leaders</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support for leaders</li><li>• Support from educational agencies</li><li>• PLD for leaders</li><li>• School infrastructure and resourcing</li><li>• Responses to climate change</li><li>• External expertise and support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connections with schools and early learning centres</li><li>• Working with iwi</li><li>• Relationships with parents and families, whānau Māori, Pacific families</li><li>• School attendance</li></ul>	Relationships with the board
Trustees	Board’s understanding of their role (obj 1 – to ensure that every student at the school is able to attain their highest possible educational standard)		Board’s understanding of their role (obj 4 – giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi)	Board’s understanding of their role (obj 3 - To ensure that the school is inclusive of and caters for students with differing needs)	Board’s understanding of their role (obj 2 –e.g., physically and emotionally safe place for all students and staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advice and support particularly from NZSTA and new leadership advisors (if implemented)</li><li>• PLD particularly through NZSTA</li><li>• Responsibility for property management and maintenance</li></ul>	Engagement with parents and families, whānau Māori, Pacific families

## APPENDIX B: Principal demographics and school characteristics

TABLE B1 Principals' gender (n = 164)

Gender	n	%
Female	112	68
Male	51	31
Prefer not to say	1	1

TABLE B2 Principals' ethnicity (n = 164)

Ethnicity	n	%
NZ European/Pākehā	143	87
Māori	23	14
Pacific (4 Samoan, 2 Tongan)	6	3
Asian (1 Indian, 2 Chinese)	3	2
Other	11	7
Prefer not to say	2	1

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple selection.

TABLE B3 Profile of principal respondents by EQI bands (n = 187)

EQI group	n	%
Fewer	73	39
Moderate	71	38
More	43	23

Note: Our principal responses are nationally representative of all English-medium primary, contributing, and intermediate school principals by EQI group.

TABLE B4 Breakdown of principal respondents by area (urban/rural) (n = 187)

Urban/Rural	n	%
Large urban area	27	14
Major urban area	69	37
Medium urban area	13	7
Rural other	34	18
Rural settlement	21	11
Small urban area	23	12

Note 1: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Note 2: Our principal responses are broadly representative of all English-medium primary, contributing, and intermediate school principals by area.

TABLE B5 Breakdown of principal respondents by region (*n* = 187)

Region	n	%
Auckland	40	21
Bay of Plenty	11	6
Canterbury	14	7
Gisborne	2	1
Hawke's Bay	6	3
Manawatū-Whanganui	12	6
Marlborough	2	1
Nelson	1	1
Northland	8	4
Otago	16	9
Southland	7	4
Taranaki	8	4
Tasman	5	3
Waikato	22	12
Wellington	30	16
West Coast	3	2

Note: Our principal responses are broadly representative of all English-medium primary, contributing, and intermediate school schools by region.

TABLE B6 Breakdown of principal respondents by school's co-ed status (*n* = 187)

Co-ed status	n	%
Co-educational	187	100

TABLE B7 Breakdown of principal respondents by school type (*n* = 187)

School type	n	%
Contributing	90	48
Full primary	90	48
Intermediate	7	4

Note: Our principal responses are broadly representative of all English-medium primary, contributing, and intermediate school by school type.

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