

# Secondary principals' perspectives from the 2025 national survey

**Uiuinga ā-Motu o ngā Kura**



**Jo MacDonald, Rachel Bolstad, Jessie Dong,  
Sally Boyd, Jackson Rowe-Williams, David  
Coblentz, Davina Hunt, Mohamed Alansari,  
Bronwyn Gibbs, and Hinemaia Priestley**

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2026

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# He whakarāpopototanga | Executive summary

NZCER conducted the National Survey of Secondary Schools in Term 4 2025 and early Term 1 2026. We invited principals and teachers from all English-medium secondary schools (including composite schools and teen parent units) 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 27 October 2025 to 6 March 2026. All principals from the 435 schools in the sampling frame were invited to complete the survey and 143 responses were received. After data cleaning, 106 principal responses were included in this report, resulting in a response rate of 24%.

NZCER has run a National Survey of Secondary Schools regularly since 2003, with the last survey of secondary school principals taking place in 2022. This enables us to monitor trends over time. This report presents the findings in each of the six survey domains alongside a section on principals' working experiences and future plans.

## Key findings

### Support and resourcing

- Overall, principals were less favourable about the Equity Index (EQI) in 2025 than they were in 2022.
- Two-thirds of principals supported the policy shift away from building open-plan spaces. Just over half indicated their school had unmet property needs that are having a negative impact on teachers and students, and, compared with 2022, fewer schools have sufficient space for all classes. Keeping learning spaces cool poses more of a challenge than ventilation or heating. Forty percent of principals reported experiencing impacts from excessively hot days.
- Principals received more helpful advice from the New Zealand School Boards Association and Ministry of Education (MoE) regional office than from other agencies. Professional learning groups and the Secondary Principals Association of New Zealand (SPANZ) were the most accessed sources of advice and support by principals.
- Schools need better access to external support for supporting students with mental health needs, supporting staff to work with students who have complex needs or trauma-related responses, and supporting students with chronic absence issues. Over 40% of principals said they needed, but could not readily access, school-based social workers, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Te Kahu Tōi Intensive Wraparound Service, Youth workers, and Oranga Tamariki social workers.
- Principals had mixed views about MoE attendance supports. Some have implemented new approaches that are improving attendance.
- “Keeping up with the pace and volume of educational change” and “too much being asked of schools” were the leading issues for principals in 2025. Compared with 2022, more principals

considered “supporting students with complex learning needs” as an issue but “providing support for vulnerable students” has returned to pre-pandemic levels. Recruiting teachers was an issue for just under two-thirds of principals, but this proportion has declined since 2018.

- More than half of schools, from 14 of the 15 regions, have experienced flooding and extreme winds in recent years. Around half of schools have supported their communities through climate-related events. Despite policy signals about the need to reduce climate emissions across the education sector (Ministry of Education, 2024a), only one-third of principals said they had information about their school’s carbon footprint.

### **Collaborative relationships**

- Principals had mixed views on the impact of the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako on their future collaboration with other schools. Around one-third said they would continue to work with schools in their network or community, and 41% thought they would be less likely to collaborate.
- Most principals reported engaging with hapū and iwi in ways that support ākonga Māori and build staff capability. A small proportion of principals reported not currently interacting with local hapū or iwi—no change since 2022.
- Most schools currently interacted with their Pacific families and communities in at least one way. However, in one-fifth of schools with Pacific students, principals responded that they did not interact with Pacific families and community leaders. Consistent with how schools engaged with hapū and iwi, the most common interactions were in relation to cultural groups and seeking guidance around how best to support Pacific students.
- Nearly all schools focused on providing information about achievement and progress to parents and whānau and worked with them to improve attendance. Most schools asked parents and whānau about satisfaction with information they received from school, but it appears to be challenging to hear from a high proportion of them.

### **Curriculum and assessment**

- Many principals were concerned about the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) change proposal. There were divided views on whether the proposed new qualifications were going in the right direction. Principals emphasised concerns about equity.
- Views on the direction of curriculum changes were mixed, but most principals disagreed that the pace of changes was appropriate. Views on benefits to students in the Mathematics and Statistics and English learning areas were also mixed, with high levels of neutral responses.

### **Teaching and learning**

- Bilingual and immersion pathways are available in some schools but are not widely established or expanding. Principals reported that te reo Māori was widely promoted in schools. Whānau engagement in Māori language planning and planning to improve staff reo Māori capability were less consistently reported.
- Principals are frequent users of generative AI intelligence (AI)—only 15% reported that they rarely or never used AI. Over half of principals wanted professional learning and development (PLD) on AI. Schools were at different stages of responding to AI in terms of having policies about teacher and student use. Access to school-provided AI tools was more common for teachers than for students, but funding was a constraint.

- More principals than in 2022 reported their school paid close attention to Years 9–10 students' academic progress, aspirations, and career goals. Principals were positive about the opportunities offered by their school's timetable for students to choose subjects that aligned with their future career goals and aspirations, and take subjects they were interested in. Nearly all agreed it was flexible enough for academic and vocational subjects to be taken at the same time. Over two-thirds of schools did not use streaming or fixed ability grouping, unchanged from 2022.

## **Inclusion**

- Nearly all principals agreed their school had well-embedded plans or processes for addressing comments or behaviour that are racist, sexist, homophobic, or transphobic. However, fewer principals than in 2022 agreed their school had well-embedded practices focused on inclusion and support for gender transitioning students and Rainbow students.
- Most principals reported good access to assistive technologies, but home access to digital technologies was more uneven, and reflected a school's EQI group, pointing to continuing inequities in students' access to the digital infrastructure needed to support learning beyond school.
- Most principals reported strong confidence in understanding and enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Nearly all agreed or strongly agreed (90%) that Te Tiriti o Waitangi was enacted in their school values and day-to-day activities.
- Practices and approaches that affirm ākonga Māori identities were widely reported. There is potential for more schools to introduce approaches that affirm the identities of Pacific students.

## **Wellbeing**

### ***Principal wellbeing***

- More principals were positive about their job, morale, and levels of workload and stress than in 2022. However, there was an increase in the proportion of principals who strongly agreed or agreed that their workload is so high they are unable to do justice to their school (34%, compared with 22% in 2025).
- Most principals worked at least 56 hours per week, with 12% working over 70 hours. This picture has changed little over the past decade.
- The majority of principals (over 70%) felt supported by their school board, got the internal support to do their job effectively, were optimistic about the year ahead and felt confident in tackling new challenges or changes that the school may face.

### ***Student wellbeing***

- Consent education is relatively widespread in secondary schools, with nearly all principals reporting students had opportunities to learn about safe relationships and consent, and relationship strategies such as building friendships. Opportunities to learn about gender identity and diverse sexualities were reported by three-quarters of principals.
- The proportion of principals who agreed that students had opportunities to learn about the healthy use of digital devices had increased substantially from the 2022 survey (82%, up from 62%).
- Nearly all schools had well-embedded processes for addressing bullying behaviour, but ensuring teachers recognise and support a wider range of student wellbeing needs was more variable.

## Principals' working experiences and future plans

- Many principals continue to want more time for educational leadership, as well as for reflection, reading, and innovation. There was an increase in the proportion of principals who would like to reduce the demands of human resource management (from 30% in 2015, increasing each cycle to 60% in 2025) and reduce external agencies' demands/expectations (from 30% in 2015, increasing each cycle to 55% in 2025).
- Principals' career plans have remained fairly stable over the past decade. More than half expect to continue as principal of their current school. Overall, there is no change in the proportion who think they will lead another school or retire (approximately a fifth each).

## Responding to the research questions

The 2025 National Survey of Secondary 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.

The 2025 survey data showed a strong commitment among principals to **honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi**. School engagement with hapū and iwi was still not universal—just under 10% of principals reported no current interaction. Encouragingly, around one-third of principals expressed a desire to build their capabilities in this area through PLD. Policy developments in the past 5 years, including the introduction of the Aotearoa New Zealand's histories curriculum and the requirements under Section 127(1)(d) of the Education and Training Act 2020, may have played a role in deepening this engagement (Bolstad et al., 2025).

Our findings show widespread reporting of practices that affirm the identities of **ākonga Māori** such as access to co-curricular activities, clear goals for academic achievement and cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing, and access to positive Māori role models. Since the last survey in 2022, there has been an increase in principals reporting that te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are incorporated into daily school-wide practices. Te reo Māori is a “hard to staff” learning area across immersion levels, and access to bilingual and immersion pathways is limited in English-medium schools. Addressing these shortfalls is critical to expanding reo Māori access for ākonga Māori in English-medium education.

In one-fifth of schools with **Pacific students**, principals said they did not interact with Pacific families and community leaders at all. Most principals reported that their school interacted with their Pacific families and communities in at least one way. There are opportunities for greater involvement in school governance—less than one-third have Pacific representation on their board. There is also potential for more schools to introduce approaches that affirm the identities of Pacific students.

Multiple topics in the survey enable us to consider the extent to which the system is designed and supported to achieve **equitable outcomes for all students**. Principals' views in 2025 reflected that they have had time to observe and reflect on what the EQI changes truly mean for their operational funding and decision making related to supporting students who face the greatest socioeconomic barriers to achievement. Overall, principals were less favourable about the EQI in 2025 than they were in 2022. Many principals wanted and needed more access to mental health and wellbeing support for students. Principals in 2025 showed less agreement than in 2022 that support for gender transitioning students and Rainbow (LGBTQIA+) students was embedded. Opportunities to learn about gender

identity and diverse sexualities were also less common than other wellbeing learning opportunities. Our findings show that inequities remain in students' access to digital technologies and connectivity at home, required to support learning beyond the school gates. Equity issues also came to the fore in principals' responses to questions about changes to NCEA and senior secondary qualifications.

Finally, in relation to **supporting the success of everyone within the system**, principals reported variable experiences of advice and support from government agencies. The leading issues facing schools in 2025 were "too much being asked of schools" and "keeping up with pace and volume of educational change". Both issues were reported by more principals than in 2022. Most principals disagreed that curriculum changes were happening at an appropriate pace. Despite these challenges, principals are overall positive about their jobs. However, over one-third reported unmanageable workloads and levels of stress.

The 2025 national survey has provided a snapshot of principals' perspectives amidst a period of significant shifts within the sector, with uncertainty about where some proposed changes will settle. The value of the longstanding NZCER national survey is its ability to monitor educational trends and policy impacts over time. The next national survey of secondary schools is likely to be 2028, when we can gain principals' perspectives on the impacts of changes that are being introduced now.

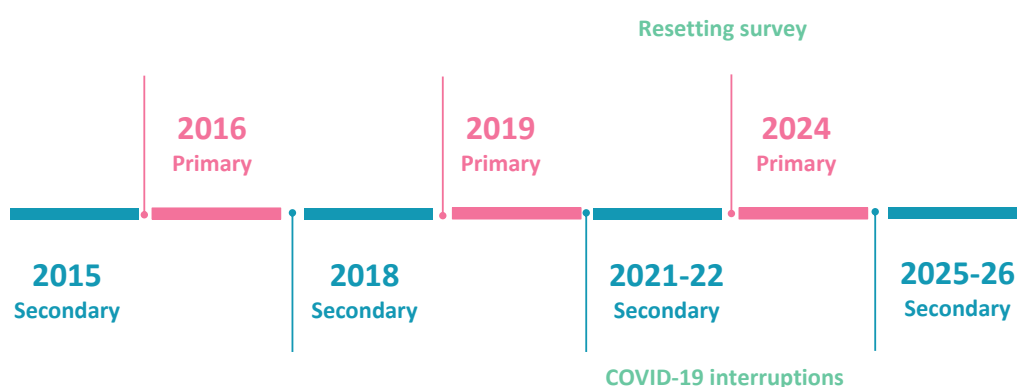
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# 1. He kupu whakataki | Introduction

## 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 School 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 (see Figure 1 for the most recent cycles).<sup>1</sup>



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FIGURE 1 Timeline of NZCER national surveys 2015–25

## Research questions

The 2025, the principal and teacher surveys were redesigned, with the aim to 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 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?

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<sup>1</sup> There were two surveys of Early Childhood Education (ECE) services, in 2003-2004 and in 2007.

## Reading the report

The focus of this report is on the 2025 secondary school principal perspectives. The 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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## 2. He tukanga | Methodology

### Participants

The 2025 national survey engaged **principals** and **teachers** from all English-medium secondary schools, composite schools, and teen parent units 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 27 October 2025 to 6 March 2026. All principals from the 435 schools in the sampling frame were invited to participate in the survey and 143 responses were received. After data cleaning when duplicate and blank responses were removed, 106 principal responses were included in this report, resulting in a response rate of 24%.

Assuming a 95% critical value, the margin of error for the principal survey is estimated to be between 8.3% and 10%, depending on the responses to each question. The responses are broadly representative by school EQI groups,<sup>2</sup> 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 A.

### Survey implementation

As of October 2025, there were approximately 435 English-medium secondary schools (including secondary, composite, and teen parent units) in Aotearoa New Zealand, according to Education Counts. A stratified sampling approach was used to draw a nationally representative sample of schools initially. On 27 October 2025, an email invitation was sent out to principals of 205 sampled schools. The email to principals included instructions about engaging their teachers, along with two survey links: one for principals and the other for teachers in their schools.

After sending the initial email invitation and weekly reminders, we followed up with a phone call to many of the schools from which no principal or teacher responses had been received. Additionally, we publicised the survey through the NZCER newsletter and worked with sector bodies to improve its visibility.

After 4 weeks, when we still needed more responses to draw a national picture of secondary schools, we opened the survey to all secondary schools and emailed principals who had not previously received the invitation. The survey remained open over the summer break. In February 2026, we emailed principals who had not completed the survey to let them know they still had the opportunity. We again worked with sector bodies to boost responses. The survey closed on 6 March 2026.

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<sup>2</sup> There are three School Equity Index Groups that estimate socioeconomic barriers for students (Fewer, Moderate, and More) as indicated in the diagram from <https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/data-services/guidelines/school-equity-index-bands-and-groups>

## Data analysis

The focus of our data analysis approach was on providing survey respondents and key educational agencies and organisations with timely feedback and survey results.

### Individualised school summary

Our goal was to provide a summary report to each school with more than 10 teacher responses.<sup>3</sup> A 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>4</sup> was conducted for closed survey questions to identify statistically significant associations between principals' views and key school characteristics (e.g., EQI group, school type, and region), as well as individual characteristics (e.g., principal ethnicity). Few statistically significant associations were identified in the principal data. Those deemed meaningful have been included and discussed in this report.

Where the same items were asked of principals in the 2022 (Alansari, MacDonald et al., 2023) and 2025<sup>5</sup> National Survey of Secondary Schools, we report notable changes (i.e., over 10 percentage points). This provides some indication of whether principals' views have changed over time. The potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector should be considered when interpreting comparisons with the 2022 findings.

Some items in the current survey were also asked of primary school principals in NZCER's 2024 National Survey of Primary Schools. Where relevant, those findings are included in this report for comparison between sectors, though as these were different surveys administered at different time points, comparisons should be viewed as suggestive only.

## Limitations

Initial response numbers were lower than desired when the survey was sent to a sample of schools in October 2025. This was likely due to the length of the survey, end-of-year pressures on schools, and the timing of survey implementation, which coincided with the release of the updated curriculum for Years 0–10. To increase participation, the survey invitation was extended to all secondary principals within the sampling frame.

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3 At the end of the teacher survey, consent was obtained from teachers for their data to be included in the school summary. Fourteen schools had more than 10 teachers who consented and received a school summary.

4 Chi-square tests for independence were used throughout the report. P-values were adjusted using the FDR (False Discovery Rate) method to control the expected proportion of false positives among significant findings. Reported results were limited to those that remained statistically significant after adjustment.

5 Data collection continued into early 2026. As most data were collected in 2025, we refer to the 2025 survey throughout the report.

The resulting margin of error ranged from 8.3 to 10 percentage points. We therefore report only differences of 10 percentage points or more and avoid placing weight on smaller differences, particularly for subgroup comparisons or comparisons across years.

The survey relies on self-reported data from principals, which introduces the potential for recall error and social desirability bias. The risk of social desirability bias was reduced by administering the survey anonymously.

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## 3. He kitenga | Findings

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

Support and resourcing was the largest domain in the principal survey, reflecting a core responsibility principals have as school leaders. The domain included longstanding national survey questions that track longer-term trends, such as access to external expertise, interactions with MoE and other educational agencies, and challenges facing schools. It also featured questions designed to capture changes in educational policy, such as principals' perceptions of the shift from the decile system to the EQI, and school property changes. In response to growing interest in principals' own PLD needs, a new question was developed. Questions asking about schools' experiences of and responses to extreme weather events and climate change were also expanded.

#### Equity Index

From 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 EQI uses a finer-grained calculation to both identify need and to allocate funding.<sup>6</sup>

In anticipation of that change, in our 2022 national survey, we included items measuring principals' perceptions of the newly introduced EQI system, and whether they thought equity funding changes were likely to improve student achievement. These items were designed in consultation with the MoE and informed by an early evaluation of how schools were responding to the EQI (Alansari, Turner-Adams et al., 2023), including key areas likely affected by changes to the funding model and associated equity funding changes. In 2025, we repeated some of these items.

#### ***Overall, principals were less favourable about the EQI in 2025 than they were in 2022***

Overall, principals were less favourable about the EQI in 2025 than they were in 2022, with 24% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the EQI system is reducing the stigma associated with socioeconomic status (down from 41% in 2022).

Of interest to policy makers is whether the shift to the EQI model for determining equity-related funding is improving equitable outcomes. We asked principals what they thought about this in relation to three key areas of potential impact: greater accuracy of funding in line with local needs; improved student achievement; and improved student engagement (Figure 2). As a result of the equity funding changes:

- 22% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that their school has more adequate operational funding that fairly reflects the socioeconomic circumstances of the school community (down from 53% in 2022)

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

- 16% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that their school has been able to increase the achievement of students who face socioeconomic barriers (down from 33% in 2022)
- 14% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that their school has been able to increase the engagement of students who face socioeconomic barriers (down from 31% in 2022).

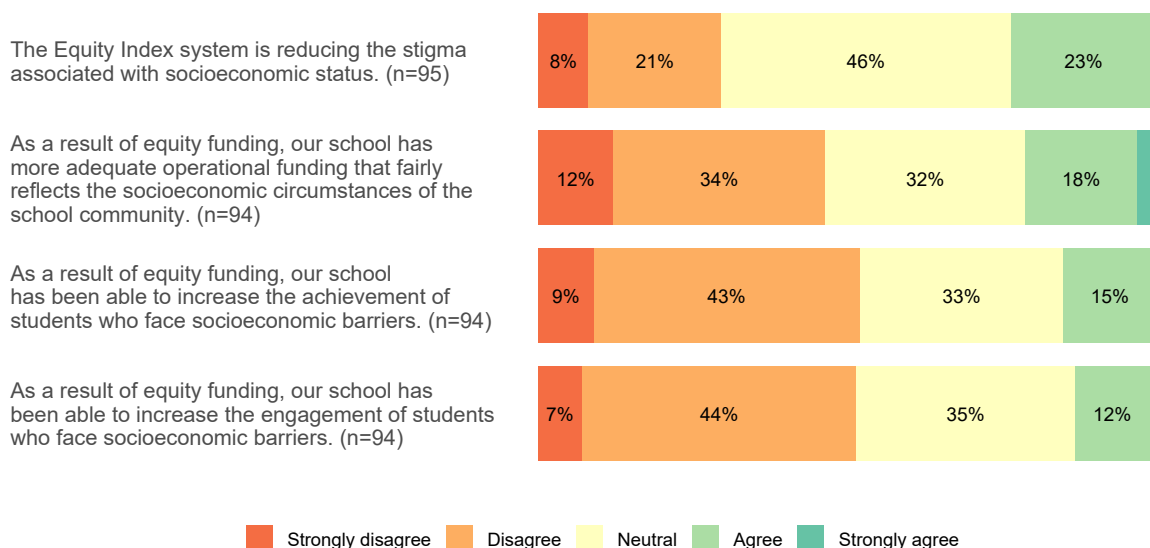


FIGURE 2 Principals' views on the EQI system

## School property

School property is the second largest social property portfolio in Aotearoa New Zealand. There have been a few key policy changes and budget investments in relation to school property since the 2022 national survey, which are at various stages of implementation. Minister Stanford's stated priorities for school property are for "warm, safe, dry learning environments, that can be delivered quickly and cost-effectively, with a stronger focus on maintenance" (Ministry of Education, 2026). Budget 2025 included capital funding for new building as well as upkeep of school property. In July 2025, the Government announced that it will establish a Crown agent to manage school property,<sup>7</sup> expected to begin operating in the second half of 2026. At the time this survey was conducted, the status quo was still in place, with school property management a shared responsibility between schools and their boards, and the MoE. In July 2025, the Government also announced a new policy to stop building open-plan learning areas, also known as flexible learning environments.<sup>8</sup>

The 2025, NZCER national survey asked several questions about school buildings. Some of these items were asked in the 2022 survey, and some new items were added to explore specific aspects of physical health and wellbeing associated with the use of learning spaces. Most of these questions were also asked of primary principals in 2024, providing an opportunity for comparison between sectors.

### *Two-thirds of principals supported a shift away from building open-plan spaces*

Figure 3 shows that a majority (66%) of secondary principals indicated agreement that the policy change was a good decision, with 41% expressing strong agreement. Only 15% disagreed, and one-fifth (20%) gave a neutral response.

<sup>7</sup> This is being called the New Zealand School Property Agency (NZSPA).

<sup>8</sup> These were first introduced from 2011 under then-Education Minister Hekia Parata.

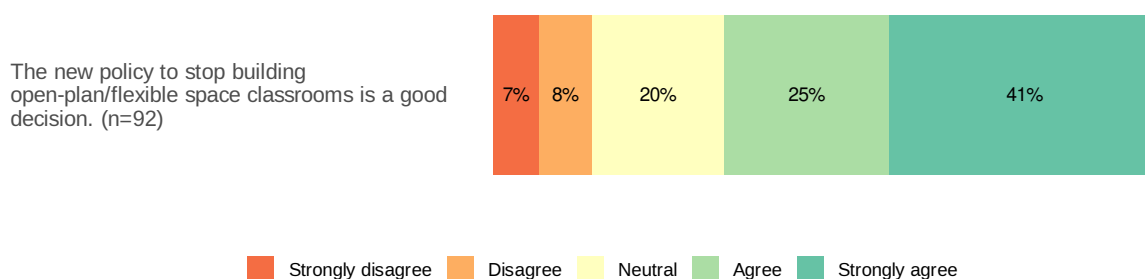


FIGURE 3 Principals' views on open-plan policy change

### ***Compared with 2022, fewer schools have sufficient space for all classes***

Figure 4 provides principals' perspectives on school buildings and space needs. For the three items that have been asked of secondary principals before, two items showed very little change since 2022, and one showed notable change:

- 57% of principals indicated their school buildings were in good condition (unchanged from 56% in 2022)
- 49% of principals indicated they had sufficient flexibility for their teaching and learning needs (53% in 2021 and 28% in 2018)
- the notable change was in the proportion of principals indicating that they had sufficient space for all their classes, which dropped to 46% in 2025, compared with 60% in 2022.

Secondary principals' responses showed lower levels of agreement with these items when compared with primary principals in the 2024 survey (Li et al., 2025) although the primary survey used a slightly different scale.<sup>9</sup> Over three-quarters of primary principals indicated their school buildings were in good condition (78%) and that they had sufficient space for all their classes (75%), while 62% indicated they had sufficient flexibility for their teaching and learning needs.

Just over half (53%) of secondary principals indicated their school had unmet property needs that are having a negative impact on teachers and students, similar to the 48% of primary principals who indicated this was the case in 2024.<sup>10</sup>

### ***Keeping learning spaces cool poses more of a challenge than ventilation or heating***

Just over a quarter (28%) of secondary principals indicated their school buildings are energy efficient and have low environmental impact, with more (41%) indicating disagreement. We also asked principals whether their school faced challenges in heating, cooling, and ventilating all their learning spaces (Figure 4).

Keeping learning spaces cool on hot days appeared to be the biggest of the three issues. More secondary principals indicated disagreement (47%) than agreement (41%) with this item. (Amongst primary principals in 2024, there was 28% disagreement and 71% agreement.)

Half (50%) of secondary principals indicated they were able to provide sufficient ventilation in all learning spaces, though 31% disagreed. (Amongst primary principals in 2024, there was 81% agreement and 19% disagreement with this item.)

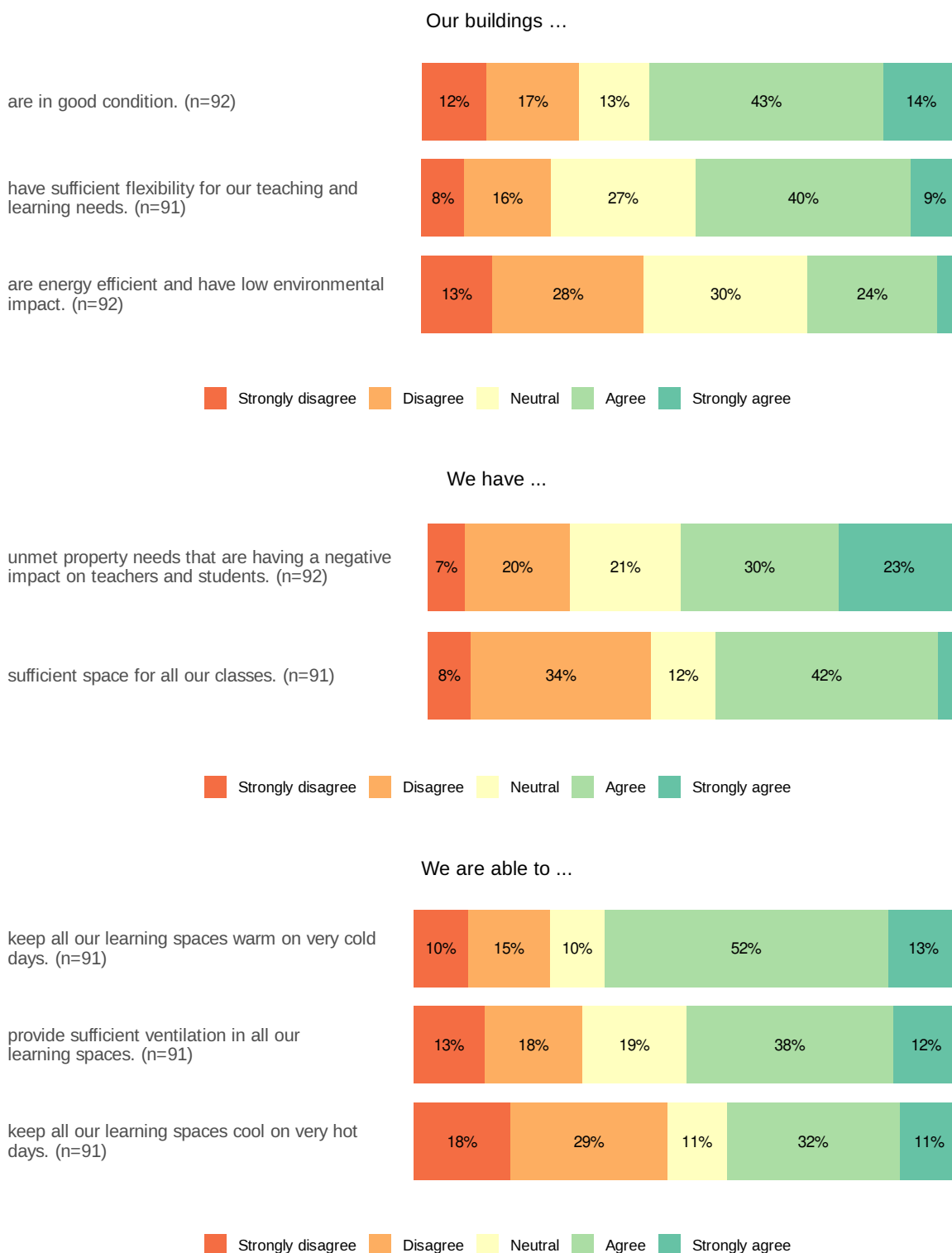
<sup>9</sup> The primary survey used a 4-point scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, with no neutral option. However, primary principals could select "I don't know" as an option.

<sup>10</sup> Later in the report, Table 9 shows that 40% of principals selected "reduce demands of property management/development" as a main change they would like in their role as a principal.

Almost two-thirds (65%) of secondary principals indicated they were able to keep all their learning spaces warm on very cold days, though a quarter (25%) disagreed. (Amongst primary principals in 2024, there was 85% agreement and 16% disagreement with this item.) Just under a quarter (23%) of principals indicated that their school experienced some challenges with heating on cold days *and* cooling on hot days.

These findings can be considered in relation to additional questions we asked relating to the climate conditions and impacts that schools have been experiencing (see the climate change section later in this domain).

### 3. He kitenga | Findings



**FIGURE 4 Principals' views about school buildings and learning spaces**

## **Accessing external advice, support, and PLD as a *principal***

Secondary schools have access to a variety of advice and support to assist them in managing their legal and moral responsibilities in areas such as curriculum and assessment, managing finances and property, and supporting student wellbeing. Access to this support has been an important theme throughout the national survey cycles. In 2025, we distinguished between accessing external advice, support, and PLD as a *principal* and as a *school*. This section focuses on principals, starting with a new question about principals' PLD needs, and followed by questions about perceptions of the helpfulness of advice and support from a wide range of sources.

### ***Over half of principals want PLD on artificial intelligence (AI) in education***

A new question in the secondary survey asked about principals' own PLD needs for the future (Figure 5). This follows its inclusion in the primary survey in 2024.<sup>11</sup>

Principals could select as many options as applied to them, as well as identifying any areas not in our list. Over half (57%) of secondary principals identified a need for PLD in AI in education, mirroring findings from primary principals in 2024 (56% of primary principals wanted PLD related to AI). Related to this, 40% of secondary principals wanted PLD on leading digital transformation (e.g., data use, AI tools, learning management systems).

A similar proportion (38%) identified a desire for PLD related to supporting their staff—supporting mental health and wellbeing for themselves or their staff and developing staff. Again, this was similar to primary principals, where 32% wanted PLD on mental health and wellbeing.

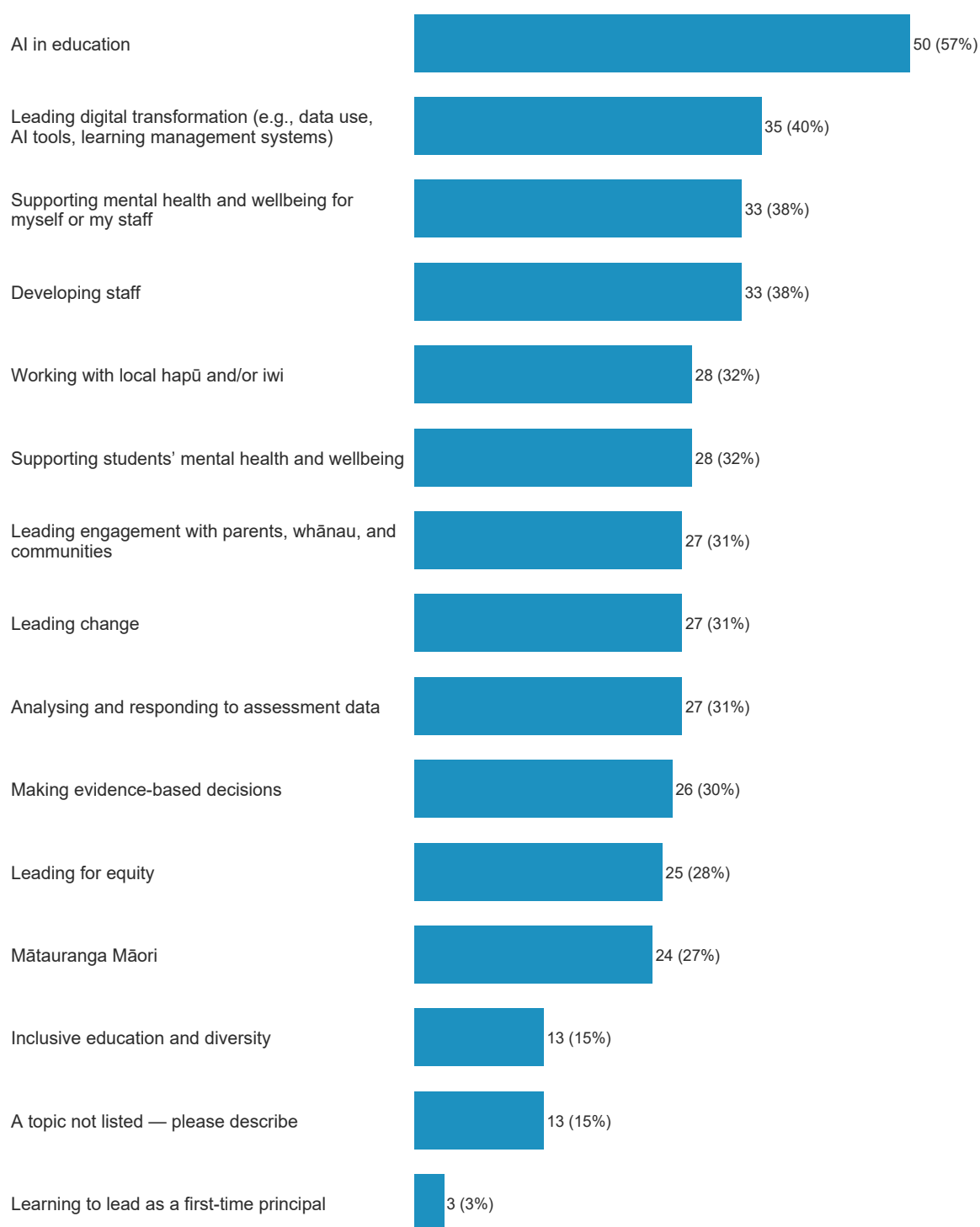
Most of the other options were selected by just under one-third of principals. One notable difference between secondary and primary principals was the need for PLD on working with local hapū and iwi—one-third of secondary principals selected this, compared with half of primary principals in 2024.

No statistically significant relationships were found between principals' years of experience and their future PLD needs.

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<sup>11</sup> There was considerable overlap in the lists presented to primary and secondary principals, but they were not identical.

### 3. He kitenga | Findings



**FIGURE 5 Professional development that principals would like for themselves in the future (n=88)**

Thirteen principals added an additional topic they would like PLD on. These included media training, improving attendance (“some actual examples of strategies that have helped, not just hearing about schools who already have high attendance”), strategic planning, property, financial management, pedagogy, and “practical tools for doing the job—hearing from experienced experts”.

### Principals received more helpful advice from the NZ School Boards Association and MoE regional office than from other agencies

This section presents principals' perceptions of the helpfulness of advice they have received from five different government-funded agencies in the past year. We have trend data for this question, although we need to be mindful of small changes in how the question has been asked over the years.<sup>12</sup>

As in previous cycles of the national survey, Figure 6 shows that most principals agreed or strongly agreed that they received helpful advice from Te Whakarōpūtanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa NZ School Boards Association (formerly NZSTA, 70%) and from their MoE regional office (65%). Just under a half agreed or strongly agreed that they received helpful advice from NZQA (48%) or the MoE Leadership Advisory Service (47%), under one-third from ERO (30%), one-quarter (25%) from the Teaching Council, and around one-fifth from the MoE national office (19%). The highest levels of disagreement were in relation to the Teaching Council (33%) and the MoE national office (31%).

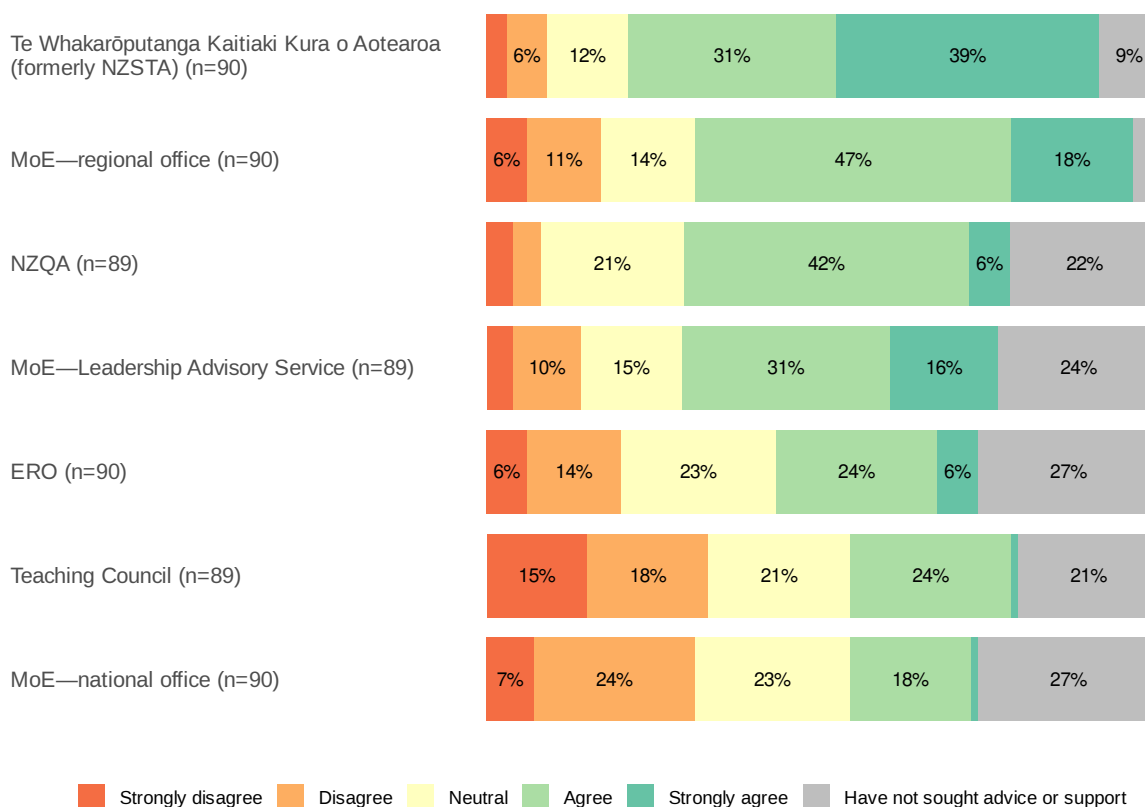


FIGURE 6 Principals' views on receiving helpful advice and support from education agencies

Table 1 compares responses to this question over time. Overall, the proportion of principals who strongly agreed or agreed that they had received helpful advice and support from many agencies has declined between 2022 and 2025, particularly notably for the MoE regional offices, NZQA, and ERO. Principals' responses to this question can be understood within a context of significant changes in the education sector. Other findings in this report highlight principals' concerns about too much being

<sup>12</sup> In this report, we include the proportion of principals who "have not sought" advice or support from each agency, which is comparable with 2022 data, but not directly comparable with 2018 and 2015 data when this was not a response option.

asked of schools, the pace and volume of change, an increase in the proportion of principals who want to reduce external agencies' demands/expectations and principals wanting consistent advice from agencies.

TABLE 1 **Principals' views on receiving helpful advice and support from government agencies, 2015–25 (% strongly agreed and agreed)**

Agency	2015 (n=182)	2018 (n=167)	2022 (n=50) <sup>13</sup>	2025 (n=90)
Te Whakarōpūtanga Kaitiaki Kura o Aotearoa (formerly NZSTA)	73	59	78	70
MoE—regional office	73	57	80	65
NZQA	79	*	66	48
MoE—Leadership Advisory Service	*	*	*	47
ERO	53	35	53	30
Teaching Council	33	43	24	25
MoE—national office	39	35	26	19

\* = not asked

### ***Professional learning groups and SPANZ were the most accessed sources of advice and support by principals***

This cycle we also asked about the extent to which principals had received helpful advice and support from principal groups and unions, and from other forms of support in the past year.<sup>14</sup> As in the previous question, we included a “have not sought advice or support” response option.

Figure 7 shows that, consistent with previous cycles, SPANZ is used by most principals (79%), with two-thirds agreeing or strongly agreeing they received helpful advice or support. Just under three-quarters of principals accessed advice and support from PPTA and 36% agreed or strongly agreed that this was helpful. There was a higher level of disagreement about the helpfulness of advice and support from PPTA (18% disagreed or strongly disagreed) than the other groups. Around half of principals accessed advice and support from the NZ Principals' Federation and the Secondary Principals' Council.

<sup>13</sup> Note that these percentages differ slightly from those reported in 2022 (Alansari, MacDonald et al., 2023). In the 2022 analysis, “no contact” responses were excluded and proportions were calculated based on those who had sought advice or support. In this table, 2022 proportions are calculated based on all principal responses. This makes the 2022 and 2025 data directly comparable.

<sup>14</sup> In 2022 and earlier cycles, the survey only asked if principals had accessed these forms of support, not about how helpful it was.

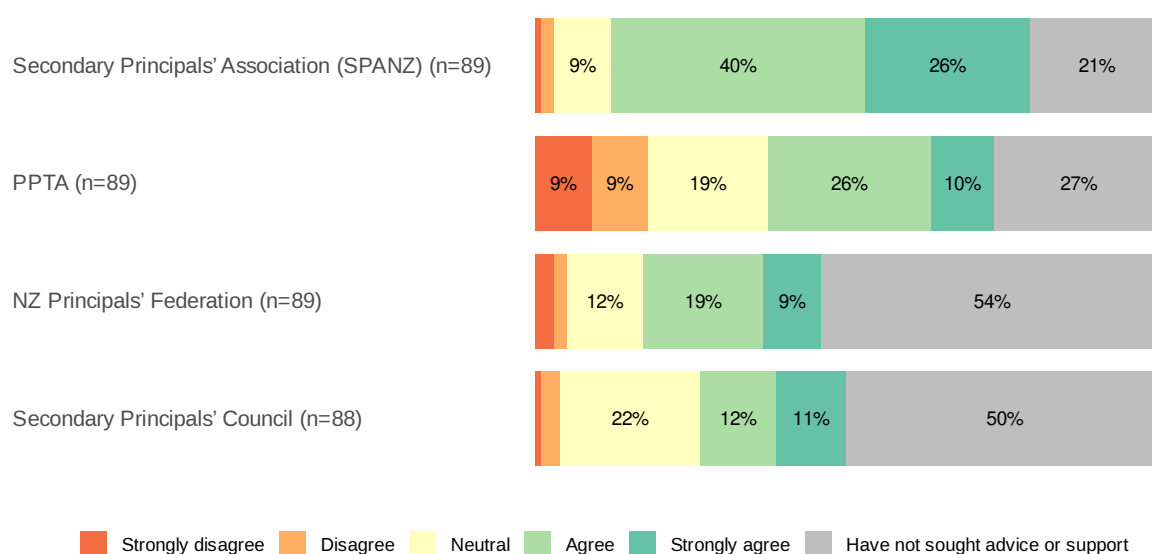


FIGURE 7 Principals' views on receiving helpful advice and support from principal groups and unions

Table 2 presents these data excluding those who had not sought advice or support and combining the strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree responses.

TABLE 2 Principals' views on receiving helpful advice and support from principal groups and unions, excluding those who did not seek advice

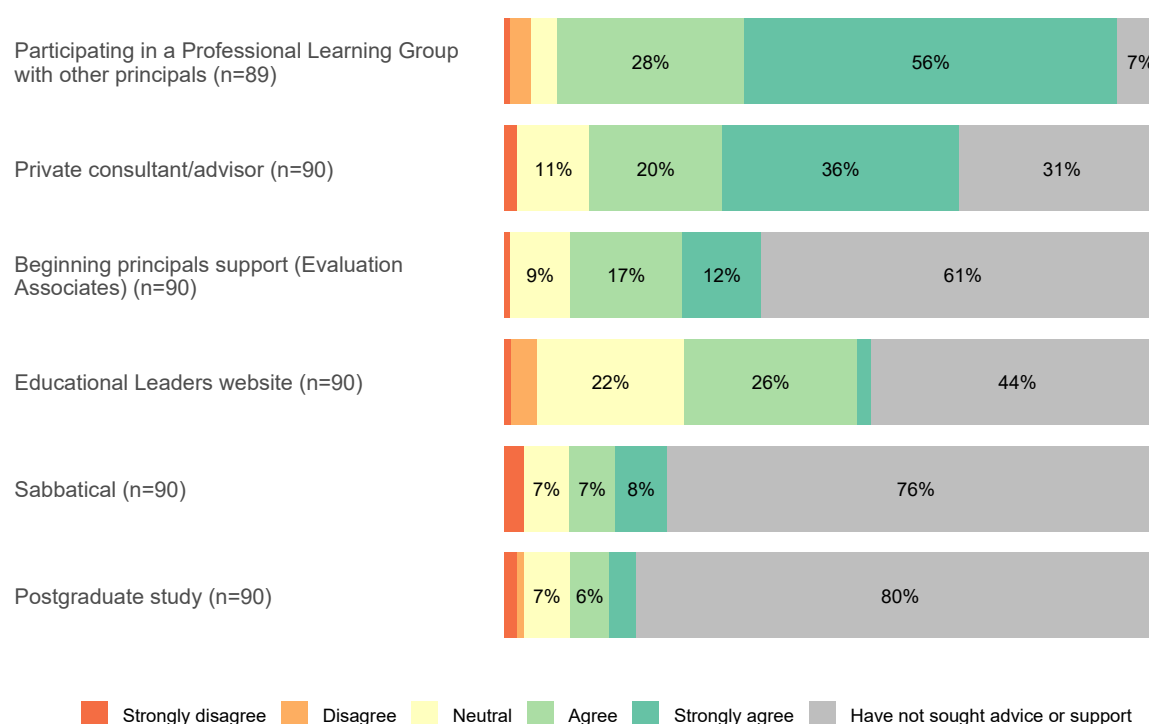
	Strongly agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
SPANZ (n=70)	84%	11%	4%
PPTA (n=65)	49%	26%	25%
NZPF (n=41)	61%	27%	12%
Secondary Principals' Council (n=44)	48%	43%	9%

For the first time, we also asked about the extent to which principals had received helpful advice and support from other sources such as specific programmes and people (see Figure 8). Nearly all principals (93%) indicated they had participated in a professional learning group (PLG) in the past year, and over half of principals strongly agreed that they got helpful advice and support from this (56% strongly agreed, 28% agreed). One principal used the Other option to say "Other principals [are the] most valuable source of support".

Over two-thirds of principals used a private consultant or adviser (and over half strongly agreed or agreed that this was helpful), and over half used the Educational Leaders website (over one-quarter agreed this was helpful and around one-fifth were neutral). As would be expected, fewer principals had a sabbatical or undertook postgraduate study (perceptions of usefulness of these were similar) or sought support from programmes for beginning principals.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Note that 39% of principals selected a response on the agreement scale for the beginning principals support provided by Evaluation Associates. Given that just 24% of principals responding to the survey had been a principal for less than 3 years, this suggests that some principals responded to this question for a timescale beyond the past year. We also asked about the Māori Beginning Principals' Programme but this was not selected by enough principals to report with confidence.

### 3. He kitenga | Findings



**FIGURE 8 Principals' views on receiving helpful advice and support from programmes and people**

Table 3 presents these data excluding those who had not sought advice or support and combining the strongly agree/agree and strongly disagree/disagree responses. This gives a more accurate picture of the extent to which principals taking up these forms of support found them helpful.

**TABLE 3 Principals' views on receiving helpful advice and support from programmes and people, excluding those who did not seek advice**

	Strongly agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree/ Disagree
Participating in a PLG (n=83)	90%	5%	5%
Private consultant/advisor (n=62)	81%	16%	3%
Beginning principals support (Evaluation Associates) (n=35)	74%	23%	3%
Educational Leaders website (n=50)	50%	40%	10%
Sabbatical (n=22)	59%	27%	13%
Postgraduate study (n=18)	50%	33%	17%

## Accessing external advice, support, and PLD as a school

This section turns to focus on accessing advice, support, and PLD as a school.

### Schools need better access to external expertise aimed at specific groups of students

We asked principals whether they could access external expertise aimed at specific groups of students who require additional support to ensure equitable outcomes. In general, principals indicated a high need for external expertise. For all seven of the listed areas, between one-quarter and a half of principals reported their school needed but could not readily access this expertise (see Figure 9). A similar pattern was evident in the 2024 primary principals' survey findings (Li et al., 2025). The expertise that half or more secondary and primary principals needed, but could not readily access, tended to be related to mental health or complex needs, namely:

- working with students with mental health needs (55% secondary; 71% primary)
- supporting staff to work with students who have complex needs or trauma-related responses (55% secondary; 69% primary)
- supporting students with chronic absence issues (51% secondary).

Fewer secondary principals (around one-third) reported they needed, but could not readily access, expertise to implement strategies to support ākonga Māori or Pacific student learning, or for engaging with whānau, hapū, and iwi. Primary principals reported a similar pattern in 2024. Looked at together, these findings suggest there is a range of unmet support needs across the sector.

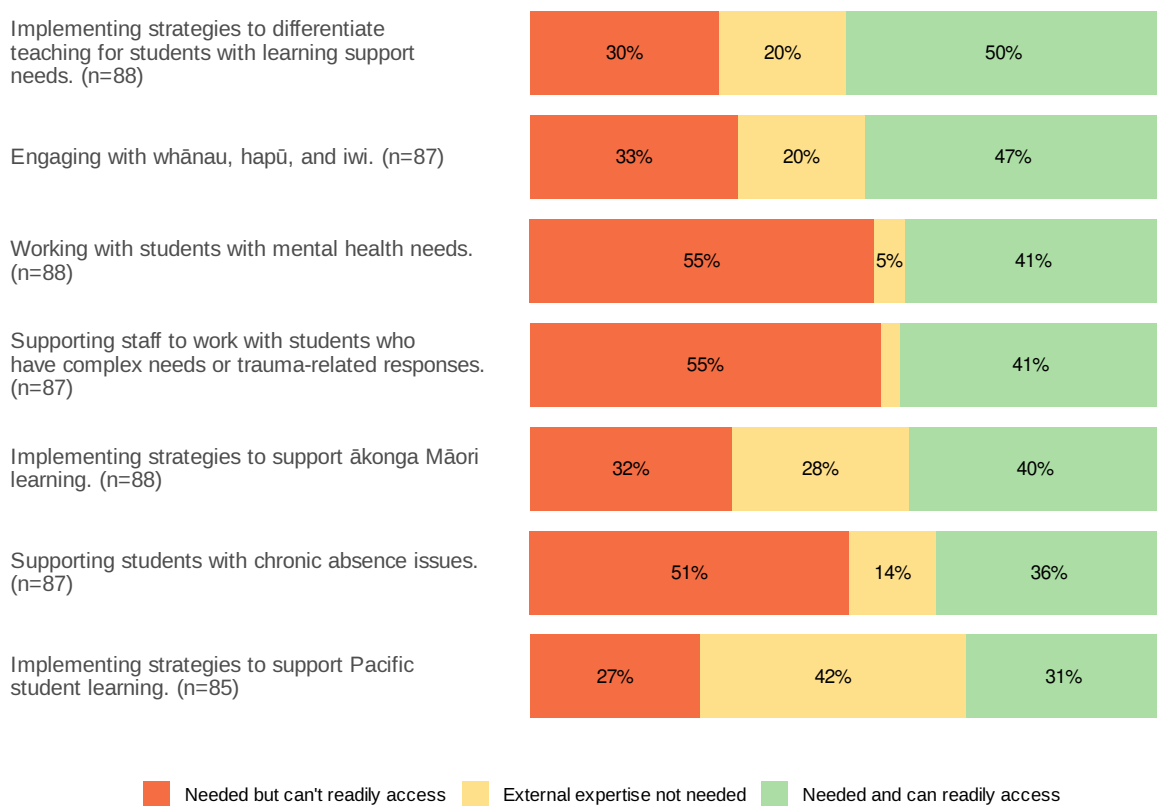


FIGURE 9 Principals' views on need for and access to external expertise

### ***Schools struggle to access people to provide external wellbeing and learning support***

Providing or accessing support for vulnerable students and students with complex learning needs are ongoing challenges for schools (see Table 4). We asked a question in the 2018 survey about schools' access to specific types of support for students. We did not ask this question in 2022, but reintroduced a version in this survey owing to the difficulties primary schools in the 2024 national survey faced accessing some forms of support (Li et al., 2025). We wanted to see if secondary schools faced similar challenges. Figure 10 shows this is the case, with over 40% of principals noting they needed, but could not readily access, five of the nine listed supports, namely:

- School-based social worker (e.g., SWIS) (63%)
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (57%)
- Te Kahu Tōi Intensive Wraparound Service (47%)
- Youth workers (47%)
- Oranga Tamariki social worker (42%).

In-school services were rated as more accessible. This pattern was also noted in the 2024 primary principals' survey. For secondary principals, the top three in-school services that were rated as needed and readily accessible were:

- Resource Teachers Learning and Behaviour (RTLB) (82%, with 10% having access issues)
- School-based Health Services (SBHS), visiting nurses or doctors (77%, with 15% having access issues)
- Counselling services (64%, with 30% having access issues).

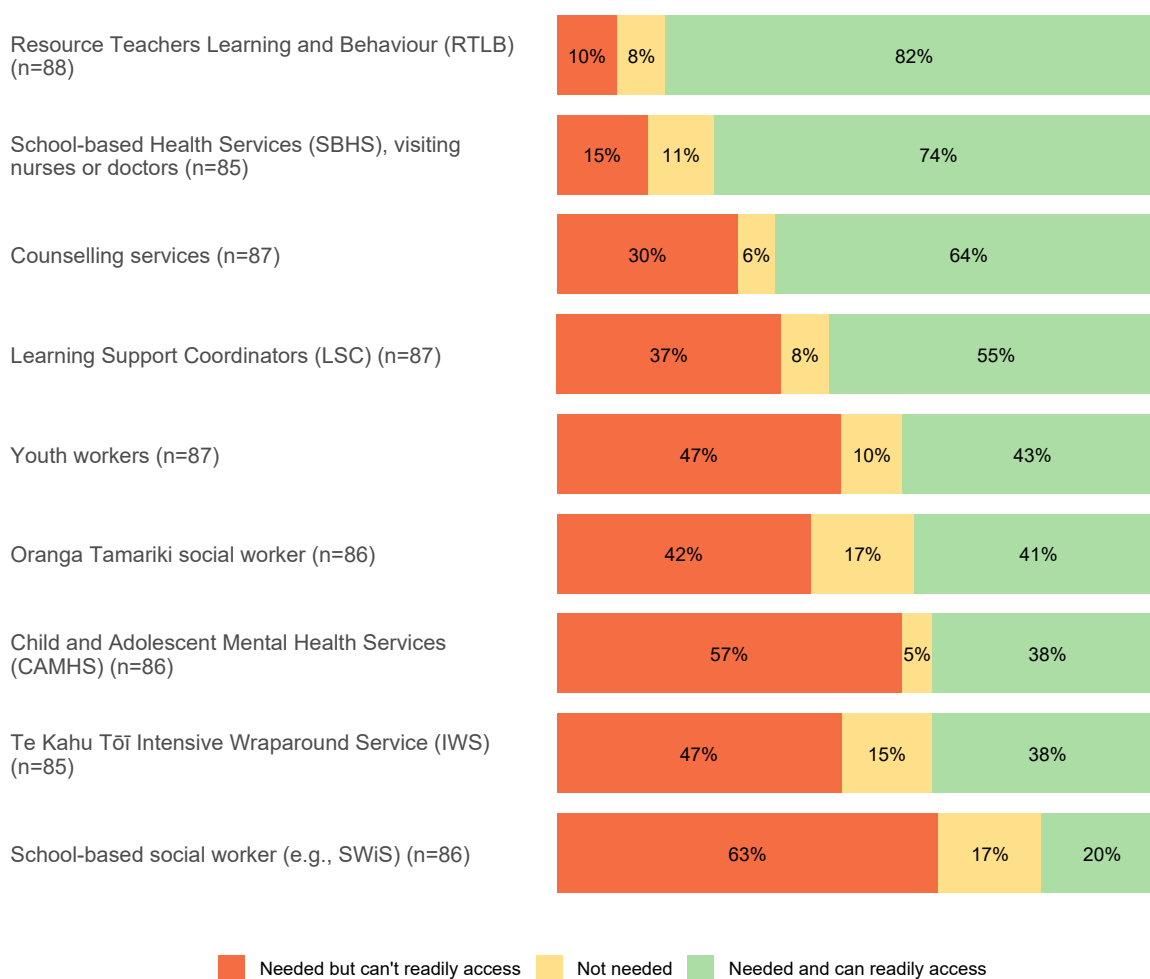


FIGURE 10 Principals' views on need for and access to people providing wellbeing and learning support

### Schools' experiences of attendance monitoring

In response to a drop in attendance over the COVID era, since 2024 the MoE has strengthened approaches to attendance reporting and support. A requirement that schools develop an attendance management plan was introduced, supported by the Stepped Attendance Response (STAR) framework which aims to assist schools to design more structured approaches to attendance monitoring and responses to different absence thresholds. Attendance support services were also strengthened.

#### Principals had mixed views about MoE attendance supports

In the *Issues facing your school* section of this report many (60%) principals reported that improving student attendance was an issue (see Figure 12). However, their experiences of recent forms of attendance monitoring and reporting were mixed, with the most common response being “neutral” (see Figure 11). Only around one-third (36%) indicated agreement that MoE attendance monitoring supports were helpful, similarly, 35% indicated they had experienced issues with attendance reporting. Less than half (45%) indicated agreement that the attendance monitoring processes had helped them implement approaches that were improving their attendance rates.

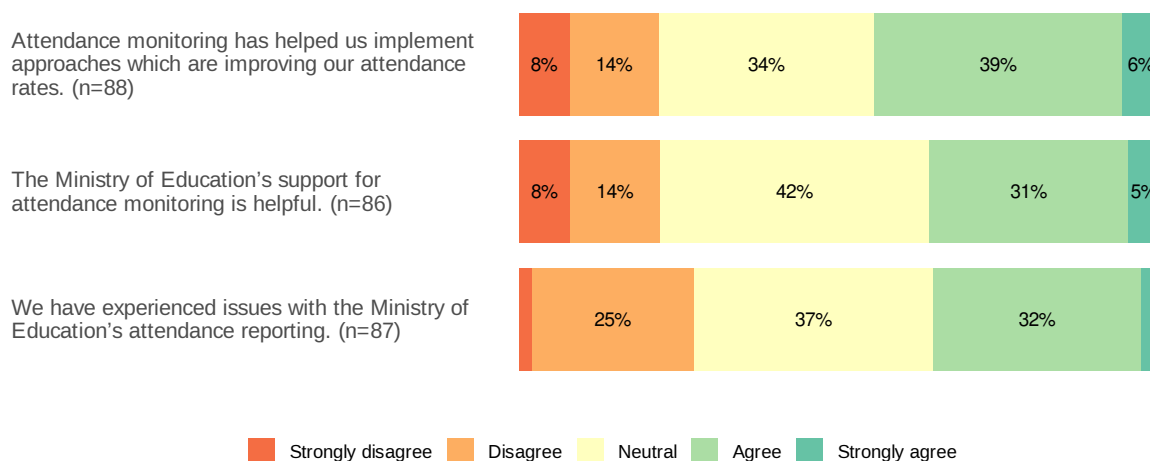


FIGURE 11 Schools' experiences of attendance monitoring

The principals who indicated they had experienced issues with attendance reporting were asked to describe these issues in a qualitative question. There were two main themes mentioned by 22 principals.

**The need for more resources, particularly to address the reasons behind chronic absence**

The need for more targeted support was the main theme mentioned, particularly to assist schools to support students and whānau who have barriers relating to health and wellbeing or poverty:

MoE is not helpful. Socioeconomic, mental health and whānau issues are the key reasons for ongoing absence which we have no answer to.

The biggest issue is that we are having to self-fund our most effective attendance monitoring and strategies. Ministry-funded or provided attendance services are next to non-existent, with one person covering a huge geographical area and a considerable number of schools.

**Problems with data codes, coding, or accuracy**

Problems with data coding, recording, or accuracy was the second theme. Half of those who commented mentioned a range of issues they had experienced:

Some things did not easily fit into the new coding. We also had some issues with staff using the wrong coding.

As an area school we find the criteria for attendance difficult as part of monitoring. This is especially true for the Medical Criteria. We have many young children who are away with illness and I do not want their whānau to feel they have to be sent back early to meet our attendance requirements. To include medical in this feels counter intuitive.

The other half commented on the amount of time and resourcing needed to enter and monitor attendance data:

Data consistency is challenged because, as a small school, we don't have the same level of admin support for checking and remediating. Additional funding for administration in small and rural schools is desperately needed.

The requirements are time consuming, and actually it is difficult for teachers to follow up when students are away for an unknown reason.

### ***Some schools changed staffing, resourcing, or practices to support attendance***

The 45% of principals who indicated their school improved their approaches to attendance were asked to describe the changes they made. A total of 33 principals offered comments that we coded into the four themes below. Most principals used two or three of these approaches.

#### **Improved systems and processes to support attendance**

The largest theme related to developing a more systematic process for attendance monitoring (as outlined in the STAR framework) and follow-up support:

Data [are] shared with tutor teachers on a regular basis and all students highlighted in traffic light colour coding. Tutor teachers must contact home if a student is in red colour code. This year we have adopted PAROT, a platform that will enable weekly reporting to parents.

Mentoring group meeting each day with a teacher (1st period) for identified Māori and Pacific students with chronic absences. This significantly improved attendance and continued engagement. At this time, we also had a teacher aide doing home visits on the way to school.

A sub-theme in this category was about developing new systems to incentivise attendance, including rewarding attendance or specifying thresholds for attendance that needed to occur before students could attend optional school events:

Pizza lunch for best mentor class, supermarket vouchers for 100% attenders etc.

Establishing 90% requirements (participation in sport, attendance at the ball etc) has been very successful.

#### **Accessing or funding additional staff or resources**

The next largest theme related to additional staffing or resourcing, often to support new systems. Staffing included people the school employed as well as access to local attendance officers:

Provide additional hours for Deans, added a counsellor, employed staff to monitoring attendance.

Employing attendance officers over and above the government funding allocation.

Some schools had allocated extra resources to address barriers that prevent students from attending school:

We have paid doctor's visits as 'medical' makes up 40% of our absences. We have had students living with staff, to get them to school. We have provided pick [ups] and paid petrol, bus and train fares. We have counselled parents through divorce, abuse and grief.

#### **Increased partnerships with whānau**

The third theme involved schools developing new ways of working together or communicating with whānau:

Our pastoral care team carefully monitors all attendance cases below the required threshold and works closely with families who need further support. There is a monthly pastoral care team meeting to review and ensure follow up. We are using regular reporting of attendance to families and communicating the expectations regularly.

Much more communication with home, much more overt messaging with students, celebrations of good attendance etc.

### **Adapting school structures to better meet student needs**

A few principals mentioned how they had changed the timetable or curriculum delivery to encourage attendance:

Adjust curriculum delivery for some students (Hybrid Learning).

### **Issues facing schools**

As in previous cycles, we provided principals with a list of issues that principals may be facing in their schools. In 2025, we added an option about the influence of social media extremism. Principals could select as many issues as currently applied to their school. Figure 12 illustrates the most commonly selected issues for secondary school principals in 2025 and Table 4 provides data from the last three survey cycles.

### ***Keeping up with the pace and volume of educational change and too much being asked of schools were the leading issues for principals***

In 2025, the Aotearoa New Zealand education system was going through the largest shift in education policy since 1989. The educational changes of significance to secondary principals in 2025 included (but were not limited to) the Education and Training (System Reform) Bill, transition to new Teaching Standards, attendance management plan requirements, disestablishment of Kāhui Ako, changes to learning support funding, changes to NCEA and senior secondary qualifications, changes to approved senior subjects, consultation on draft curricula for six learning areas in Years 0–10, and downgrading a legal requirement for schools to give effect to the Treaty of Waitangi.

It may not be surprising, therefore, that 86% of principals selected “too much being asked of schools” as an issue, compared with 76% in 2022 and 61% in 2018. Similarly, 85% of principals felt the pace and volume of change was an issue in 2025, compared with 71% who reported it was hard to keep up with the pace of change in curriculum and NCEA in 2022.

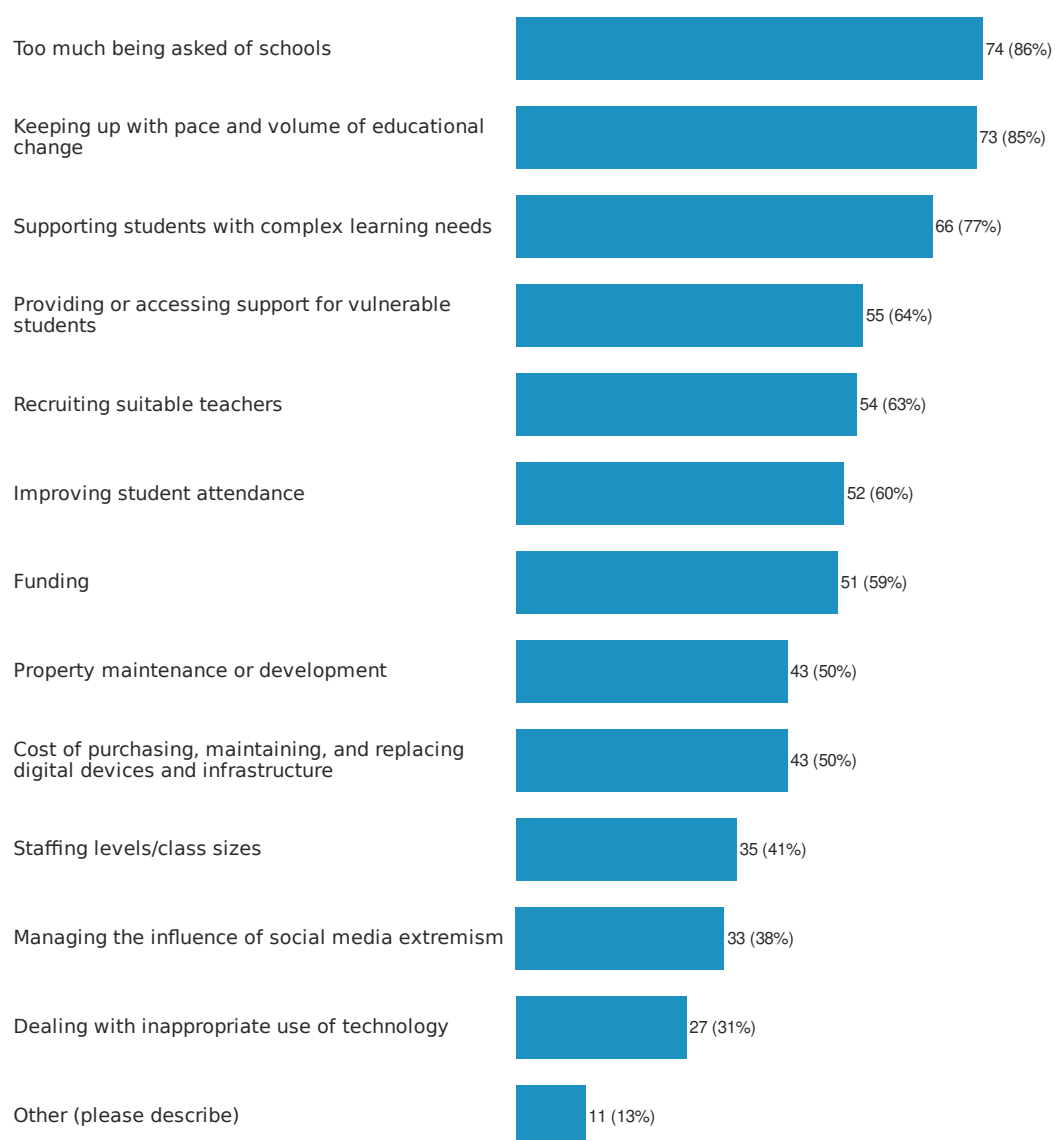


FIGURE 12 Principals' views on issues facing their school (n=86)

Table 4 compares secondary principals' responses to issues facing schools across 2018, 2022, and 2025.

TABLE 4 Issues facing secondary schools, 2018–25

Issue	2018 (n=167) %	2022 (n=45) %	2025 (n=86) %
Too much being asked of schools	61	76	86
Keeping up with pace and volume of educational change	*	71	85
Supporting students with complex learning needs	*	64 <sup>16</sup>	77
Providing or accessing support for vulnerable students	66	80	64
Recruiting suitable teachers	73 <sup>17</sup>	71 <sup>17</sup>	63
Improving student attendance	*	38 <sup>18</sup>	60
Funding	64	56	59
Property management or development	53	44	50
Cost of purchasing, maintaining, and replacing digital devices and infrastructure	55 <sup>19</sup>	40 <sup>19</sup>	50
Staffing levels/class sizes	47	38	41
Managing the influence of social media extremism	*	*	38
Dealing with inappropriate use of technology	48	53	31

\* = not asked

### ***More principals see supporting students with complex learning needs as an issue but providing support for vulnerable students has returned to pre-pandemic levels***

Over three-quarters (77%) of principals reported supporting students with complex learning needs as an issue in 2025. This has increased from the 64% of principals in 2022 who had issues with accessing specialist support for students with additional learning needs. However, the proportion of principals who identified the issue of providing support for vulnerable students (e.g., wellbeing or mental health needs) has returned to pre-pandemic levels. This is promising; however, it still remains a considerable issue for close to two-thirds of principals (64%). There is also likely to be overlap between vulnerable students and those with complex learning needs.

### ***Managing the influence of social media extremism was an issue for over a third of principals***

A new issue included in 2025 was the managing the influence of social media extremism. Thirty-eight percent of principals selected this as an issue facing their school. Interestingly, dealing with inappropriate use of technology was identified as an issue by fewer principals in 2025 (31%, compared with 48% in 2018 and 53% in 2022). In addition, more principals (82%) agreed that students had opportunities to learn about the healthy use of digital devices and impact of social media on wellbeing in 2025, up from 62% in 2022. This mitigative measure may be a driver to reduce inappropriate use of technology and is discussed further in the Wellbeing domain.

<sup>16</sup> In 2022, this was worded, “Accessing specialist support for students with additional learning needs”.

<sup>17</sup> In 2018 and 2022, this was worded, “Recruiting quality teachers”.

<sup>18</sup> In 2022, this was worded, “Low student attendance”.

<sup>19</sup> In 2018 and 2022, this was worded, “Cost of maintenance and replacement of digital technology”.

Other issues raised by principals included emphasising the impact of government directives or politicisation of education, staff welfare, and parents' increasing demands on schools.

***Recruiting teachers was an issue for just under two-thirds of principals, but has declined since 2018***

Fewer principals (63%) identified recruitment of suitable teachers as an overall issue in 2025, compared with previous surveys (73% in 2018 and 71% in 2022).

The 54 principals (63%) who indicated that recruiting suitable teachers was an issue were asked, "In which areas do you have difficulty recruiting suitable teachers?" (see Figure 13 for details related to learning areas). Most principals answering this question found it difficult to recruit suitable teachers for the same learning areas as in 2022; however, there are noticeable changes in availability of subject specialist teachers.

Science and Technology learning areas, including their speciality subjects within these areas, have become increasingly difficult to staff over time, with 61% of principals in 2025 unable to recruit suitable teachers for either area. This is up from 47% for Science and 33% for Technology in 2022. Warning of a potential crisis point in the recruitment and retention of technology teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand was provided by Reinsfield and Lee (2021). At that time, it was noted there were misconceptions about the purpose and nature of technology education and an ageing demographic in specialist technology teachers. The impact on schools was that they were increasingly having to adapt their programmes offered to suit the knowledge and skills of the teachers they could attract, rather than develop programmes that were responsive to their students' needs or interests.

Although 61% of principals found it difficult to recruit Mathematics and Statistics teachers in 2025, this was an improvement from the 72% of principals who found this difficult in 2022.

Difficulty in recruiting suitable te reo Māori teachers has remained stable, with 57% of principals indicating this is an issue in 2025, compared with 61% of principals in both 2018 and 2022. Of the 25 principals who gave more information about having difficulty recruiting to teach in te reo Māori, 15 were seeking kaiako for Levels 4b and 5 (less than 3 hours/week immersion), 13 for Levels 1–2 (3–12.5 hours/week), and 13 for Levels 3 and 4a (12.5–25 hours/week).

Interestingly, there was a large increase in principals who found it difficult to recruit suitable teachers of English in 2025 (41%), compared with 22% in 2022.

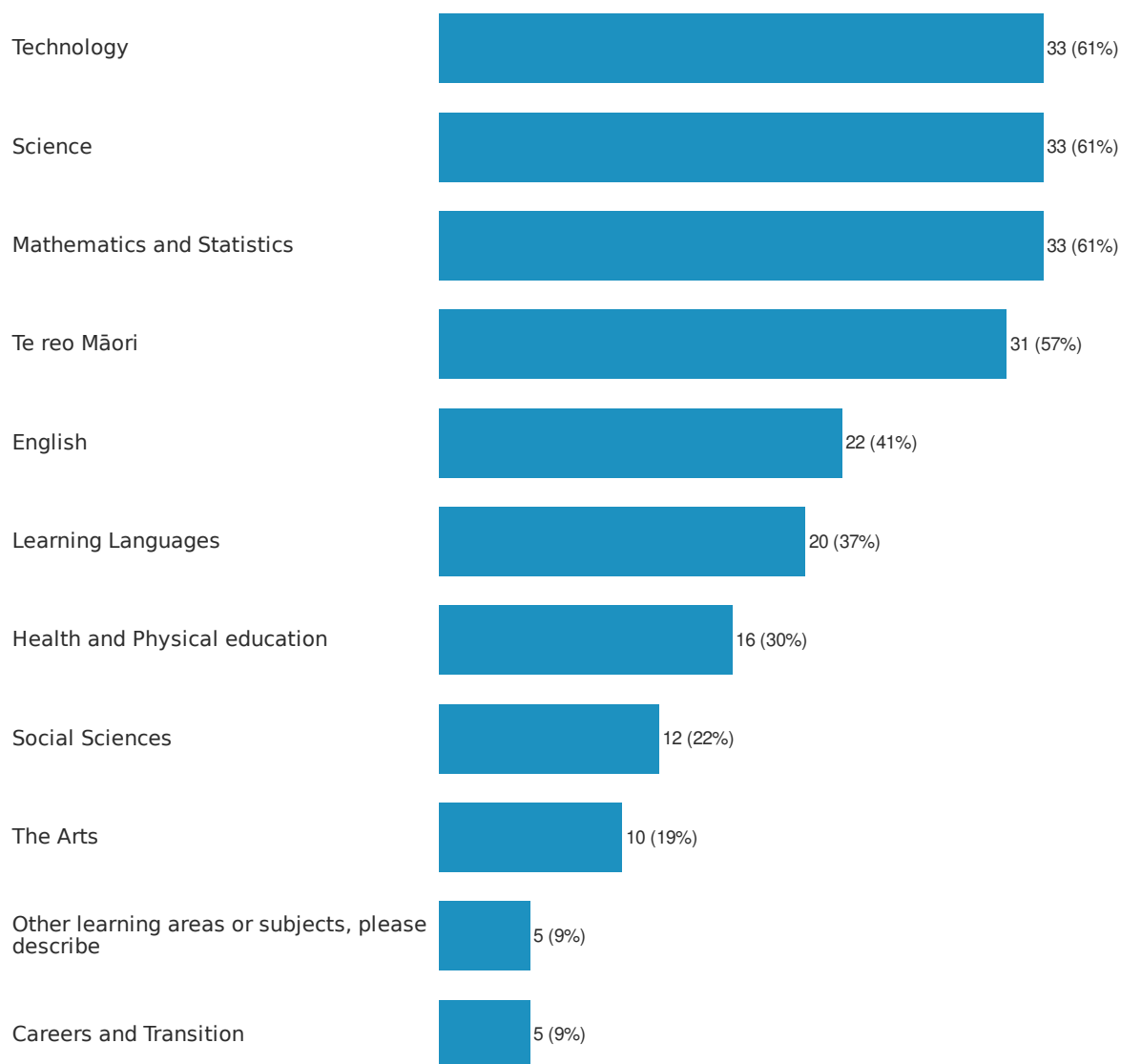


FIGURE 13 Learning areas that principals find hard to staff (n=54)

**Recruitment difficulties lead to employment of people with Limited Authority to Teach**

In response to recruitment issues, most principals (83%) who had difficulty recruiting suitable teachers had employed people with Limited Authority to Teach (LAT):

We have six LATs. All currently training to become teachers as there aren't sufficient teachers available.

We have had to employ people who don't even qualify for a LAT to keep the school running.

Technology was the most common learning area for principals to recruit LATs to teach. A third of principals employed people with LAT for teaching Te reo Māori and The Arts. Science, Physics, Horticulture (5 principals), and Outdoor education or Health and Physical education (4 principals). Other LAT roles included itinerant music, literacy specialist, social worker, careers and guidance counsellors, and relievers.

### Recruitment difficulties lead to schools not offering subjects

One-third of principals with recruitment difficulties (32%) had stopped offering subjects. Of these, nine schools removed one subject and six could not offer two to five subjects. These were across six learning areas: The Arts (drama, music, dance), Learning Languages (Samoan, Spanish, French, Japanese, Te reo Māori), Technology, Science (Chemistry, Ag Hort, Physics), Social Sciences (Geography, Accounting, Business), and Health and Physical Education (Outdoor Education).

### Responding to climate change

NZCER has asked questions about climate change in primary and secondary national surveys since 2019. Since 2024, we have asked more detailed questions for both sectors to explore climate-related impacts on schools and their communities, along with carbon footprints and school-wide sustainability and climate action.

#### *More than half of schools have experienced flooding and extreme winds*

Regional storm and flooding events have significantly impacted schools and communities in recent years (see Li et al., 2025). As Table 5 shows, more than half of secondary principals (55%) indicated that flooding had impacted either school property and/or staff and student access in the past 5 years. This was even higher than the percentage of primary principals who reported this in the 5 years up to 2024 (31%), possibly due to the high number of extreme weather events in 2025 and in the first 2 months of 2026. Floods impacting staff or students' homes were reported by 41% of secondary principals, again slightly more than was reported by primary principals in 2024 (32%). By region, at least one secondary principal in 14 of the 15 regions reported at least one form of flood impact for their school or community.<sup>20</sup> Just over half of secondary principals (52%) reported extreme winds causing damage or safety concerns.<sup>21</sup> Again, these principals' schools were located across 14 of the 15 regions.<sup>22</sup>

TABLE 5 Schools' experiences of weather-related impacts in the past 5 years (n=83)

Type of impact	N	%
Flooding that impacted school property and/or impacted staff or students' school access (e.g., roads, bridges)	47	57
Extreme wind (e.g., causing damage or safety concerns at school)	43	52
Flooding that impacted the homes of families and/or staff	34	41
Excessively hot days (e.g., students are unable to concentrate in class due to heat, or need to limit physical activities outside)	33	40
Excessively cold days (e.g., difficult to heat learning spaces, students or staff unable to travel to school due to snow or ice)	20	24
No, we haven't experienced any of the above weather events	12	14

20 The only region for which no principals reported a flooding impact was Taranaki.

21 This was not asked about in the 2024 primary survey.

22 The only region for which there were no principal reports of extreme winds was Marlborough.

### ***Heat was an issue for some schools***

Globally, heatwaves were the most significant climate hazard to disrupt schooling globally in 2024, affecting an estimated 171 million students worldwide (UNICEF, 2024). While extreme heat has been a less common experience in Aotearoa New Zealand, emerging definitions of localised “heatwaves” explain that these can be relative to the baseline temperature and climate norms experienced in those locations (Harrington & Frame, 2022). In our survey, 40% of secondary principals reported experiencing impacts from excessively hot days,<sup>23</sup> compared with only 24% who experienced issues with excessively cold days. The principals who indicated impacts from excessively hot days were located across 12 regions,<sup>24</sup> while reports of excessively cold days came from principals in nine regions.

### ***One-third of schools had information about their 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. In 2023, as part of the Carbon Neutral Government Programme, the MoE 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.

Just under a third of secondary principals (30%) had information about their school’s carbon footprint (Table 6), most often from the MoE, though a few had organised these measures themselves. The majority of principals (71%) said their school did not have such information.

TABLE 6 **Principals’ responses to whether they had information about their school’s carbon footprint (n=85)**

<b>Information about school’s carbon footprint</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
No, we do not have this information	60	71
Yes, we have requested and been provided with this information from the Ministry of Education	22	26
Yes, we have measured it ourselves (alone, or with support from an expert)	3	4

### ***Around half of schools have supported their communities through climate-related events***

In 2025, we asked principals a range of new items about the impacts and actions they are experiencing in relation to climate change (Figure 14).<sup>25</sup> The highest agreement was with the item “Our school has provided support to our community during and after climate-related events” (47% agreed or strongly agreed). This was higher than the 35% of primary principals who agreed or strongly agreed with this

<sup>23</sup> Twenty-one of the 33 principals who reported experiencing excessively hot days also indicated challenges with keeping all learning spaces cool on hot days—see section on school property.

<sup>24</sup> The regions for which there were no such responses were Marlborough and Tasman.

<sup>25</sup> The 2024 global OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) also included a series of questions for principals about climate change and environmental sustainability. Data from these sections of TALIS have not yet been reported, so we are not able to compare our findings with this larger global dataset.

statement in 2024, and the 29% of secondary principals in 2021 who responded to a similar item, “Our school community has been experiencing impacts of climate change”.

It is worth noting that two of the largest weather events—Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland Anniversary floods—both occurred in early 2023, collectively impacting over 500 schools.<sup>26</sup> Although there have been many more extreme weather events since that time, there has been no national reporting of school closures due to extreme weather events. This may change with a recent update to the school attendance dashboard that will capture reasons for school-day closures.<sup>27</sup>

There was less evidence of schools taking action on climate and sustainability issues. On a positive note, 40% agreed or strongly agreed that their school board actively supports a focus on sustainability and action on climate change, and almost as many (38%) said these issues were a strong focus in their curriculum. Principals were somewhat more divided on whether student leadership in these areas was strong in their school. While more than a third (35%) indicated agreement, similar proportions indicated disagreement (31%) or gave a neutral response (36%). Over a quarter of principals (28%) agreed their school was taking active steps to reduce emissions, though around the same proportion (29%) indicated disagreement.

The strongest disagreement was with the statement that “We have a school-wide focus on reducing emissions associated with how students and/or staff get to and from school”. Half (50%) indicated disagreement with this statement, 11% strongly. The MoE’s most recent emissions inventory estimated over 277,000 tonnes of emissions were produced as a result of staff and student commutes to school in 2024, representing more than a third of all emissions produced by state school and kura activity. Transport has been identified as one of three key areas that should be prioritised for emission reduction<sup>28</sup> (Ministry of Education, 2024a).

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

27 See [https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2026-01/Recording%20School%20Closed-Days%20in%20SMS.pdf?VersionId=B2G0LvILOKzI\\_KLaUib4gPmnXcYXvq92](https://web-assets.education.govt.nz/s3fs-public/2026-01/Recording%20School%20Closed-Days%20in%20SMS.pdf?VersionId=B2G0LvILOKzI_KLaUib4gPmnXcYXvq92)

28 The other two are construction and property, and food supply and waste.

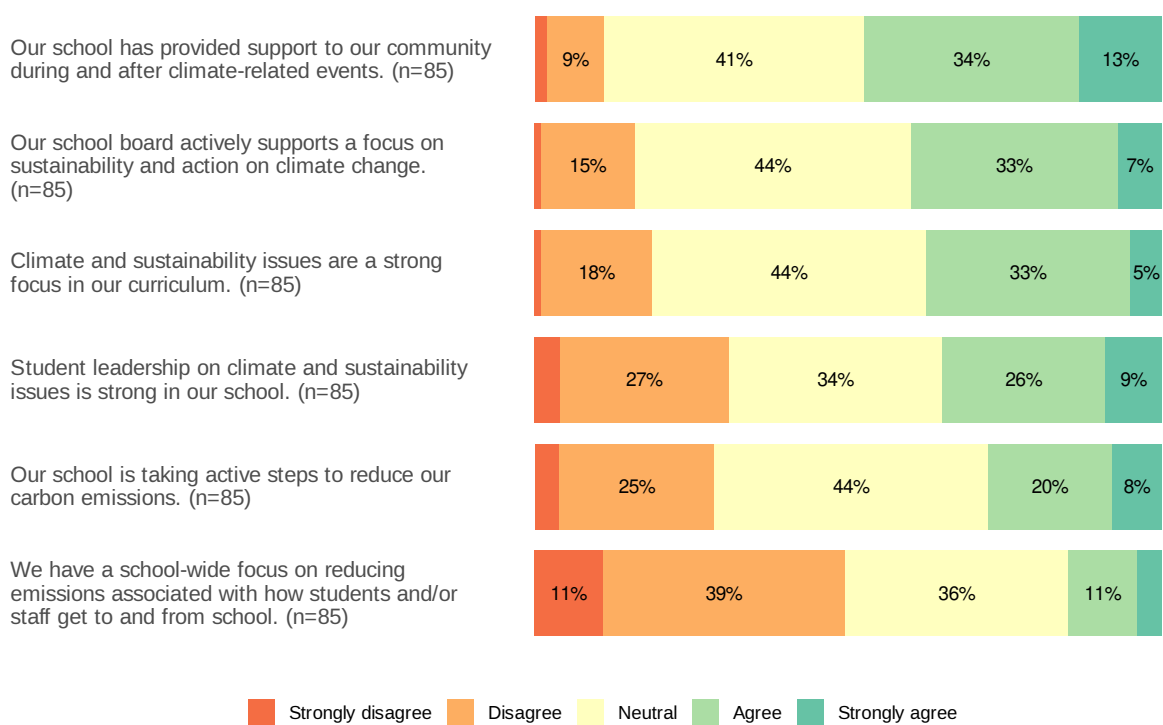


FIGURE 14 Principals’ views on their school responses to climate change

## He hononga pāhekoheko | Collaborative relationships

The Collaborative Relationships domain asked principals about their relationships with others in the wider community and education system, such as parents and whānau, local hapū and iwi, and Pacific families and community leaders. We also asked principals to predict what impact the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako would have on their school’s joint work and collaboration with other schools.

### Working with other schools

Kāhui Ako were established and funded through the *Investing in Educational Success* (IES) initiative, which came to an end in 2025. This was a government initiative that provided the financial means and guiding structures for schools and early learning services to collaborate professionally and develop a shared plan for improving student outcomes (formally known as Achievement Challenges) over a significant period of time. This became one of the key MoE-funded initiatives to endorse and track school networks, with the first wave of approved Kāhui Ako beginning operations in early 2015. By 2025, ERO reported 220 Kāhui Ako across Aotearoa New Zealand, spanning 1,950 schools and 1,500 early learning services.<sup>29</sup>

In previous survey cycles, we have asked principals about their school’s involvement in Kāhui Ako, and whether this facilitated stronger collaborations aimed at improving teaching and learning outcomes. In late 2025, we wanted to know about the potential impact of disestablishing—or no longer funding—Kāhui Ako, including whether schools are likely to continue collaborating through non-MoE-funded initiatives or resourcing.

29 <https://www.ero.govt.nz/sites/default/files/media-documents/2025-09/K%C4%81hui%20Ako%20release%20pack.pdf>

### **Principals had mixed views on the impact of disestablishing Kāhui Ako on their future collaboration with other schools**

As can be seen in Figure 15, just under half (46%) of principals indicated that disestablishing Kāhui Ako will make no difference, as they will either continue to work with schools in their network or community (31%) or they are not part of a Kāhui Ako anyway (15%). However, the other half indicated that the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako will either lead to less likelihood of collaborations (41%) or introduce uncertainty around future collaborations (8%). Only 5% of principals indicated they will be more likely to collaborate following the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako.

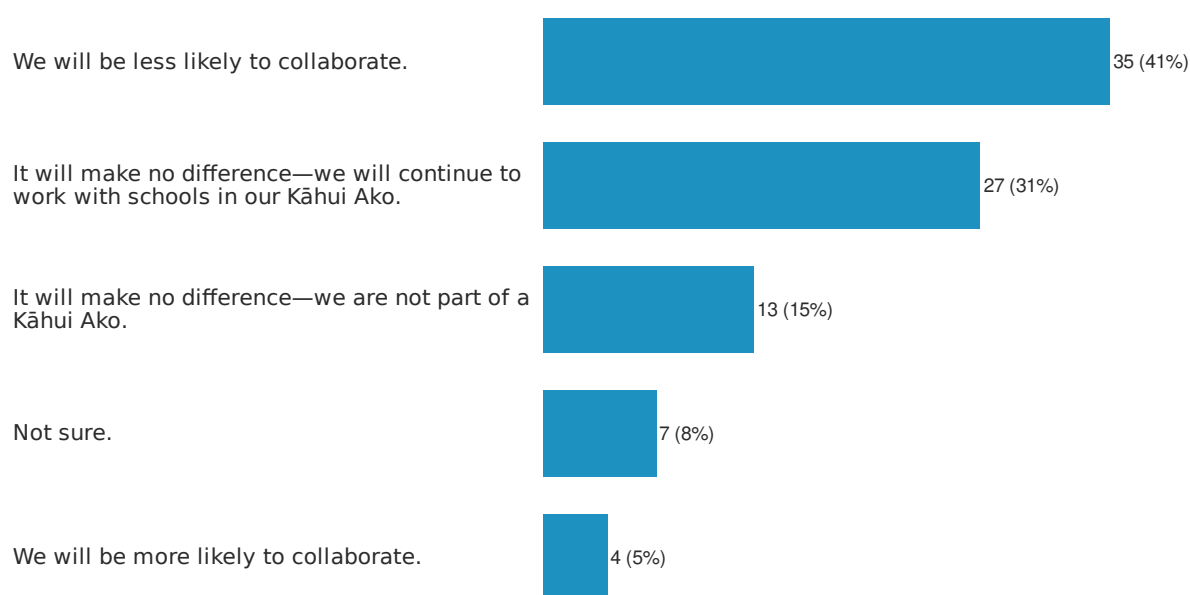


FIGURE 15 Principals' views on the likely impact of the disestablishment of Kāhui Ako (n=86)

### **Working with local hapū and iwi**

This section reports on schools' interactions with hapū and iwi and includes both previously asked and new items. This question explored how and to what extent schools were engaging with hapū and iwi across a range of areas, including teaching and learning, strategic decision making, and supporting ākonga Māori success.

#### **Most principals reported engaging with hapū and iwi in ways that support ākonga Māori**

A small proportion of principals reported not currently interacting with local hapū or iwi (8%, no change from 7% in 2022). Most principals reported engaging with hapū and iwi in ways that support ākonga Māori and build staff capability (see Figure 16). This included involving hapū and/or iwi in co-curricular activities such as kapa haka (69%), actively seeking their guidance on how to better support ākonga Māori (68%), paying hapū and iwi for their contributions (e.g., when they provide PLD, share their histories, advise on tikanga and reo Māori) (55%), and hapū and iwi supporting kaiako to develop their capabilities (e.g., for reo Māori, tikanga, histories, kapa haka) (54%).

Around half of principals reported hapū and iwi involvement in more strategic aspects of school decision making. This included representation on the school board (55%), involvement in strategic

planning (51%), and contributing to curriculum planning for Aotearoa New Zealand’s histories (48%). The proportion of principals reporting hapū and iwi representation on school boards increased from 42% in 2022 to 55% in 2025, suggesting a possible shift towards greater inclusion in governance.

Some principals reported sharing and discussing information about engagement and success for ākonga Māori with hapū and iwi (44%), indicating that data-informed collaboration with hapū and iwi is occurring in some schools, but is not yet widespread. Fewer principals reported direct involvement of hapū and iwi in teaching and learning within the school (27%).

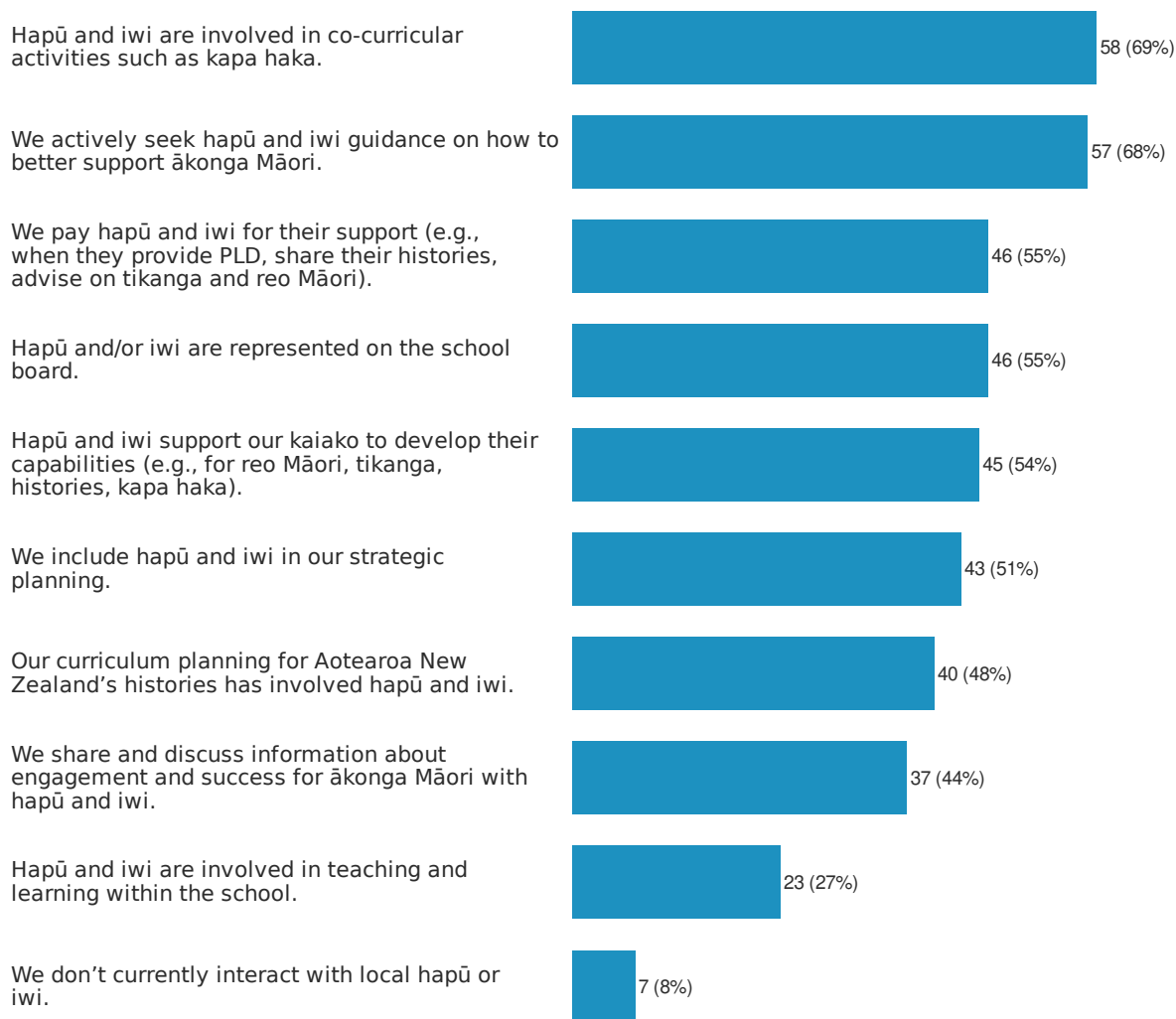


FIGURE 16 Principals’ views on their school’s interactions with hapū and iwi (n=84)

### Working with Pacific families and communities

In this section, we report on schools’ interactions with Pacific families and/or community leaders. This question was new to the survey in 2025, to align 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. It mirrored the question on working with hapū and iwi, above.

***Most schools with Pacific students interacted with Pacific families and community leaders in at least one way***

Most schools (89%) responding to the survey currently have Pacific students (11% of principals said they did not). Principals who responded that their school currently had Pacific students were asked about the type of interactions they had with Pacific families and/or community leaders (see Figure 17).<sup>30</sup> Of the schools with Pacific students that responded (n=71), most are currently interacting with their Pacific families and communities in at least one way. However, in one-fifth of schools (20%) with Pacific students, principals responded that they did not interact with Pacific families and community leaders.

Figure 17 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 and contributing to co-curricular activities such as cultural groups (59% of principals). These were also the most commonly reported interactions reported by primary school principals in 2024.

Around half of principals reported sharing and discussing information about engagement and success with Pacific families and communities (52%) and including strategies for engaging with Pacific families in their strategic plan (48%). Fewer principals reported that there was Pacific representation on their school board (28%) or that Pacific students' data were disaggregated into the Pacific nations represented.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Note that 10 principals in schools with Pacific students skipped this question.

<sup>31</sup> Note that we did not ask principals about how many Pacific students were in their school which would influence schools' ability to do this.

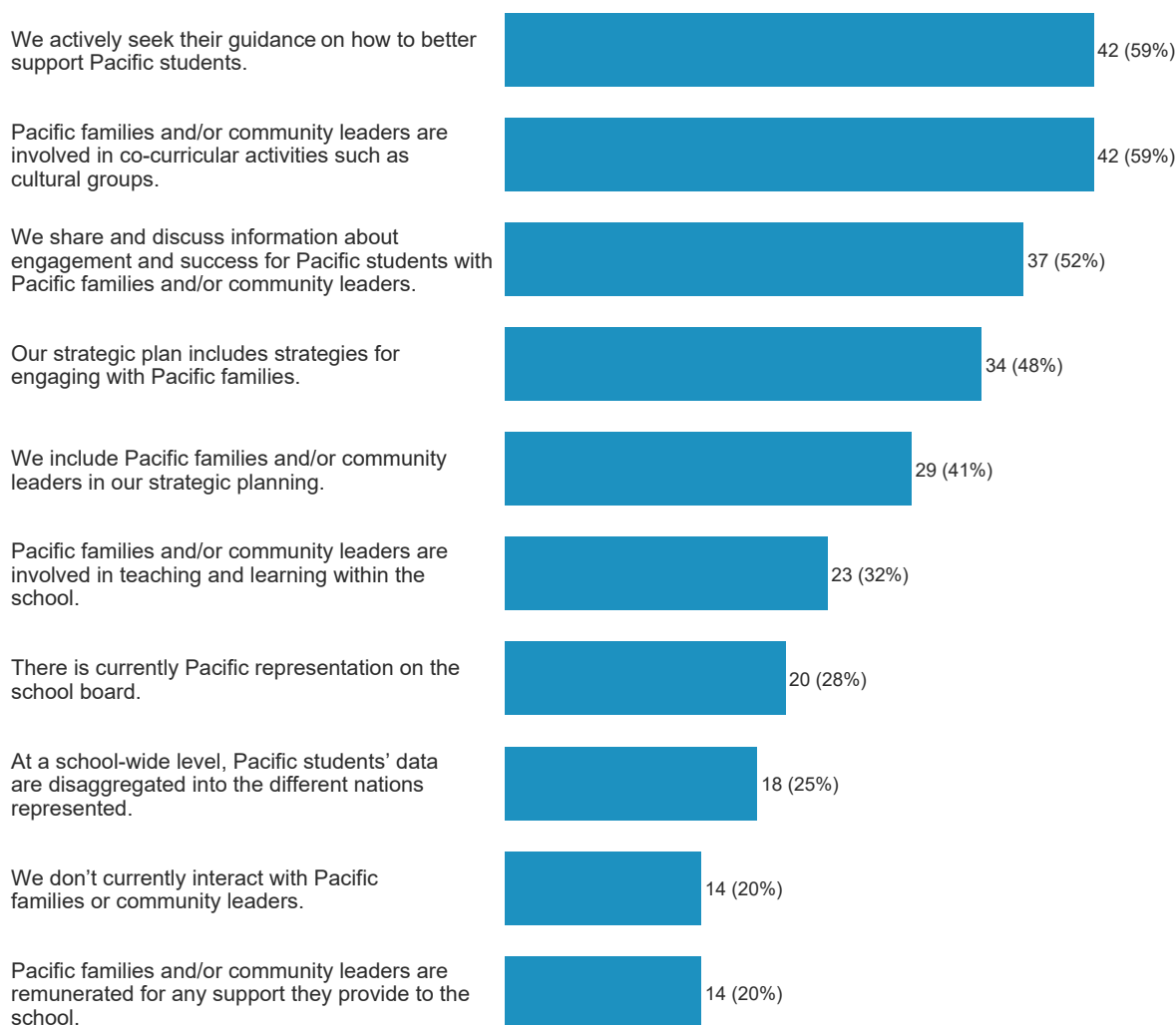


FIGURE 17 Principals' views on working with Pacific families and community leaders (n=71)

### Working with parents, whānau, and the wider community

In this section, we report on schools' interactions with parents, whānau, and the wider community. Most of these items were new to the survey in 2025, although similar topics may have been covered in board of trustee surveys when these were included in the national survey.

#### ***Most schools asked parents and whānau about satisfaction with information but it appears to be challenging to hear from a high proportion of them***

The first two items in Figure 18 show that nearly all schools focus on providing information about achievement and progress (98%) and working with whānau and community to improve attendance (92%). No principals disagreed with these statements, but a few selected neutral.

Most principals (70%) also agreed or strongly agreed that they regularly check how satisfied parents and whānau are with the information they receive (a quarter of principals selected the neutral option, and 5% disagreed). However, just one-third of principals agreed or strongly agreed that they received feedback from a high proportion of parents and whānau when asked for their input. More principals disagreed than agreed with this item.

The item about relationships with local businesses and organisations to provide career experiences for students was added to the principal survey in 2022. In both 2022 and the latest survey, nearly all (90%) principals agreed or strongly agreed (90%) that their school has good community relationships, with no principals disagreeing (11% neutral).

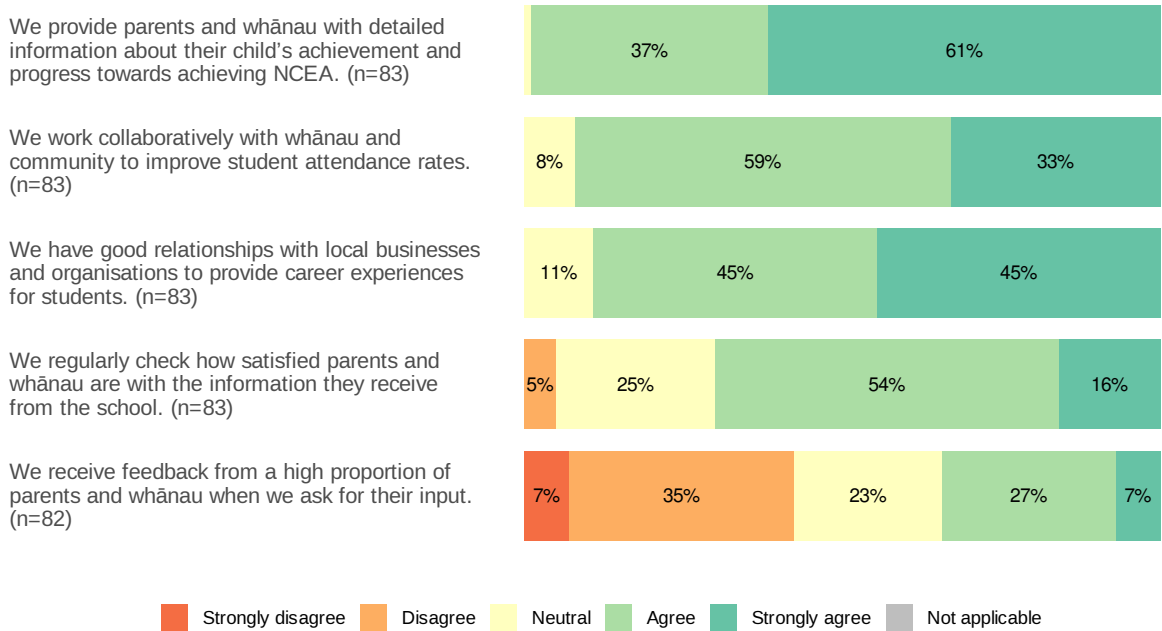


FIGURE 18 Principals' views on working with parents, whānau, and the wider community

## Te marautanga me te aromatawai | Curriculum and assessment

Curriculum and assessment were in a substantial period of change when we undertook the national survey. The update to the New Zealand curriculum is the most significant period of national curriculum change since the release of *The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* (Ministry of Education, 2007) in 2007 and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa (TMOA)* (Ministry of Education, 2008) in 2008. When we sent the national survey to principals and teachers at the end of October 2025, it coincided with schools being able to see the whole of the updated curriculum for Years 0–10 for the first time, though some parts were still in draft.<sup>32</sup> The updated Years 11–13 curriculum documents were not yet out for feedback. In addition, consultation on a proposal to replace NCEA with a new qualifications pathway for senior secondary took place in August and September 2025, prior to our survey being implemented.

In this period of transition and flux, we garnered principals' perspectives on these substantial changes and on assessment practices in their school. The findings give a snapshot at that moment in time.<sup>33</sup>

### NCEA and senior secondary qualifications

NZCER's national surveys have been asking questions about NCEA and senior secondary qualifications since 2003, with questions reviewed and revised each cycle to ensure relevance to the policy context at the time.

Following a 2018 review of NCEA that identified concerns about complexity, inequity, and an overemphasis on credit accumulation, the Government confirmed a major NCEA reform package in 2020 (*Kōrero Mātauranga*, 2019) and began phased implementation through to 2023. When we last surveyed secondary principals in 2022, these changes were largely still in the design and early implementation phase.

There has since been an even more significant policy shift, with the Government in 2025 proposing to replace NCEA entirely with a new national qualification system (including removing Level 1 and introducing new Years 12 and 13 certificates). Given these changes, none of the items we asked about in 2022 were directly relevant to ask again in late 2025. Instead, we asked new items to capture the current status of NCEA, including recently implemented changes, and further changes on the horizon. Some of these items were also included in the teacher survey.

### Principals were concerned about the NCEA change proposal

Figure 19 shows that a majority of principals indicated agreement (70%, with 57% strongly agreeing) that NCEA should be improved rather than removed. Similarly, 68% indicated concern that the proposed changes will limit the learning opportunities and pathways for students in their school. Principals had divided views about whether the current literacy and numeracy co-requisites were working well for most students in their school—more indicated disagreement (47%) than agreement (37%).

Regarding the proposed changes, just under half (47%) indicated disagreement that the proposed change to the new Year 12 and Year 13 certificates were going in the right direction, and the same

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32 Updated English and Mathematics and Statistics content was released on 19 October 2025, replacing previously gazetted curriculum content for Years 1–6 English and Years 1–8 Mathematics and Statistics which was in place from January 2025. On 28 October 2025, draft curriculum content for Years 1–10 for all remaining learning area was released. More information about the changes including timelines is available at [tahurangi.education.govt.nz/draft\\_curriculum\\_years0to10](https://tahurangi.education.govt.nz/draft_curriculum_years0to10)

33 As we finalised this report in May 2026, the Government revised the timeline for curriculum implementation (see [tahurangi.education.govt.nz/our-story](https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/details-ncea-replacement-confirmed)) and confirmed details of the replacement to NCEA (see <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/release/details-ncea-replacement-confirmed>).

proportion (47%) indicated disagreement that their school could implement the proposed changes in the time frames proposed. For each of these two items, 28% of principals indicated agreement with the proposed direction and time frames, and a quarter (24%–25%) were neutral.

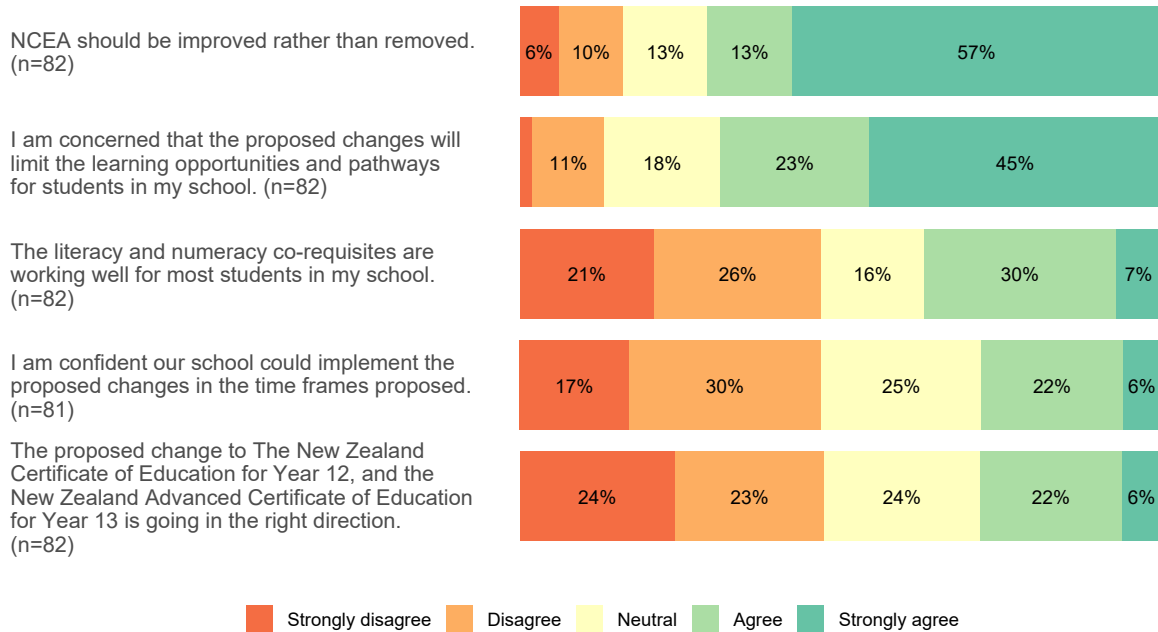


FIGURE 19 Principals' views on NCEA and proposed changes announced in 2025

Figure 20 shows that principals have concerns about the impact of the proposed changes to senior secondary qualifications. Less than a quarter (23%) agreed or strongly agreed that proposed changes would support better outcomes for their students (over half disagreed), and even fewer (11%) thought the changes would reduce inequities in student outcomes (72% disagreed).

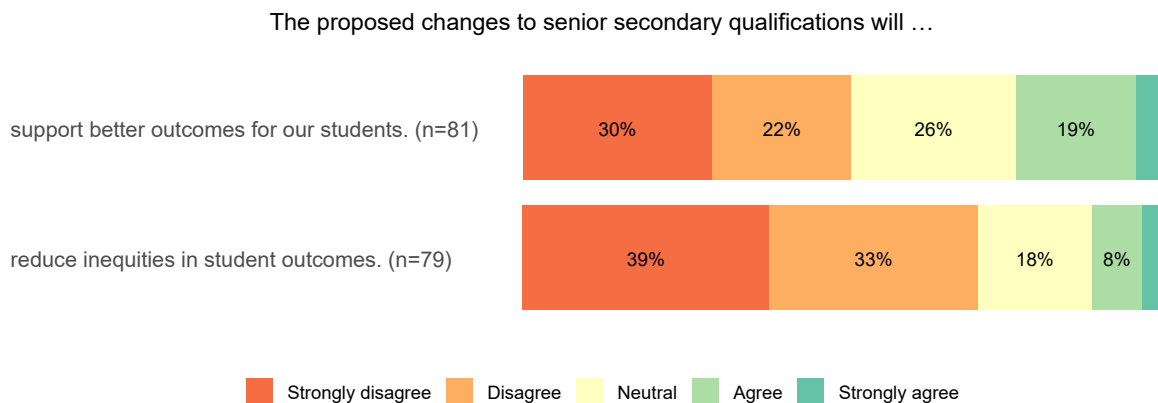


FIGURE 20 Principals' views on the impact of the proposed changes to senior secondary qualifications

### **Principals emphasised concerns about equity**

Thirty-three principals responded to an open question inviting any other comments about the proposed changes to NCEA and senior secondary qualifications. Consistent with the picture in Figure 20, the most common theme (around a third of comments) related to concerns that this could widen, not reduce, inequities for learners:

In general I believe the proposed changes are backward looking and do not represent the best direction for all students to achieve greater equity, and I think the planning shows that the changes will not be well supported or resourced given the Cabinet paper noted that it will be fiscally neutral, and also that Māori, Pasifika<sup>34</sup> and [learners with special needs] are likely to be negatively impacted.

Closing pathways for students will reduce equity, not enhance it, and achievement rates will fall.

The new system is designed to produce 'winners' and 'losers' and does not allow for a true mix of vocational and academic pathways.

The second most common theme was a view that the proposed change did not have a sufficiently strong rationale, that it was rushed, and that there had not been enough consultation:

I think changes have been rushed and pushed through with little consultation with the profession especially those working in high EQI schools. It has become rather a mishmash with little thought to the unintended consequences of the changes and I am not hopeful that a solution has been found. I suspect things will become worse before they become better.

I am concerned that these changes are being progressed before the senior secondary curriculum has been fully developed or embedded. The pace of reform feels rushed, and the educational rationale has not been clearly articulated or evidenced. As a sector, we are being asked to implement structural changes without sufficient clarity about the intended learning outcomes or how success will be measured.

Six comments specifically supported retaining NCEA (with improvements):

NCEA is a world class qualifications system. There are things that could improve and that is what we should be working on. The model we have in NZ is something other countries look at with envy. Why on earth would we change the essence of it?

Three comments said more detail was needed, and three expressed general agreement with the direction of change:

I think this is a long-term project, but I believe over time it will reduce inequities. However, we won't see changes in the knowledge and understanding students gain at primary/intermediate for 5–10 years, so there will be a delay until we see changes to the senior secondary qualifications rates.

### **The updated New Zealand Curriculum**

As outlined above, NZC has been undergoing a period of significant change, with ongoing revisions and staged releases of new content. At the time of the survey, schools had access to updated curriculum content for Years 1–10 English and Mathematics and Statistics in NZC and Te Reo Rangatira and Pāngarau in TMOA which were scheduled for required use from the start of 2026. Schools also had access to draft curriculum content for the remaining Years 1–10 learning areas for NZC from October 2025, scheduled to be implemented from 2027.<sup>35</sup> The period in which our survey was

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<sup>34</sup> We refer to Pacific students, families, and communities throughout this report, consistent with an MoE shift in use from Pasifika to Pacific. The term "Pasifika" is widely used by educators, and we have left this unchanged in quotations.

<sup>35</sup> The remaining draft wāhanga ako for TMOA were only available from January 2026, so would not have been seen by principals who completed the survey in late 2025.

conducted overlapped with the consultation period for all draft components of the curriculum up to Year 10. Curriculum development at the senior secondary level was still in progress. Draft Years 11–13 curriculum content was not yet available for feedback at the time of the survey, with release scheduled for 2026 and phased implementation planned from 2028. This meant schools were engaging with newly available curriculum content while other components were still being developed, providing an important context for understanding principals' responses.

**Views on the direction of curriculum changes were mixed, but most principals disagreed that the pace of changes was appropriate**

Principals were asked for their views on the direction and pace of changes to the updated NZC. Views on direction were mixed (Figure 21). Around one-third of principals (33%) agreed or strongly agreed that the changes are going in the right direction, while a larger proportion (41%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 26% selected a neutral response. The sizeable neutral group may indicate that views were still forming.

Views on pace were less positive. Most principals (74%) disagreed that changes were happening at an appropriate pace, compared with 14% who agreed and 12% who selected a neutral response.

Secondary principals and teachers had similar perspectives on the direction and pace of change (see MacDonald et al., 2026, for teacher perspectives).

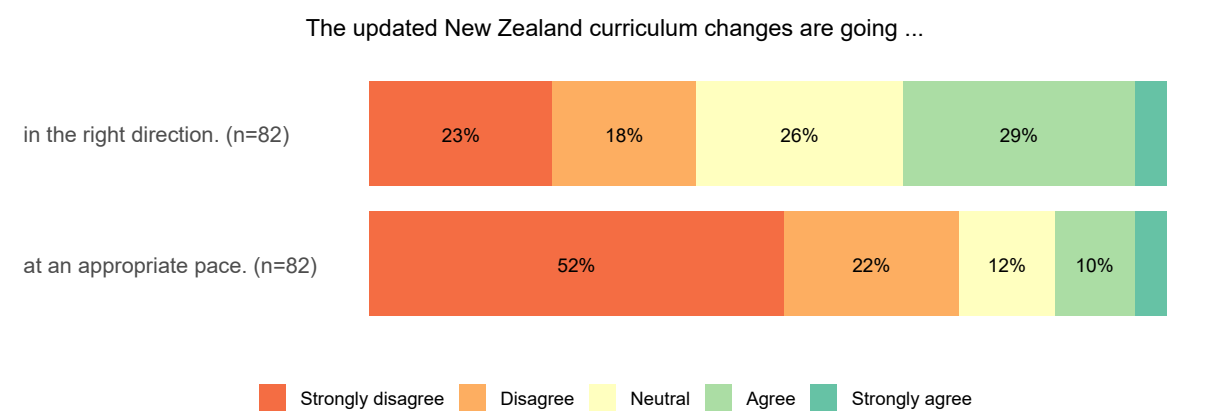


FIGURE 21 Principals' views on the direction and pace of curriculum changes

**Views on benefits to students in the Mathematics and Statistics and English learning areas were mixed, with high levels of neutral responses**

Principals were asked whether they believed students would benefit from changes to the Mathematics and Statistics and English learning areas (Figure 22). Views were mixed, with a large proportion selecting a neutral response.

For Mathematics and Statistics, 33% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that students would benefit, while 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 40% selected a neutral response. A similar pattern was evident for English (32% agreement, 30% disagreement, 38% neutral).

The high proportion of neutral responses may reflect the timing of the survey. At the time of data collection, schools had only recently been able to view the full Years 0–10 curriculum, and the Years 11–13 curriculum had not yet been released.

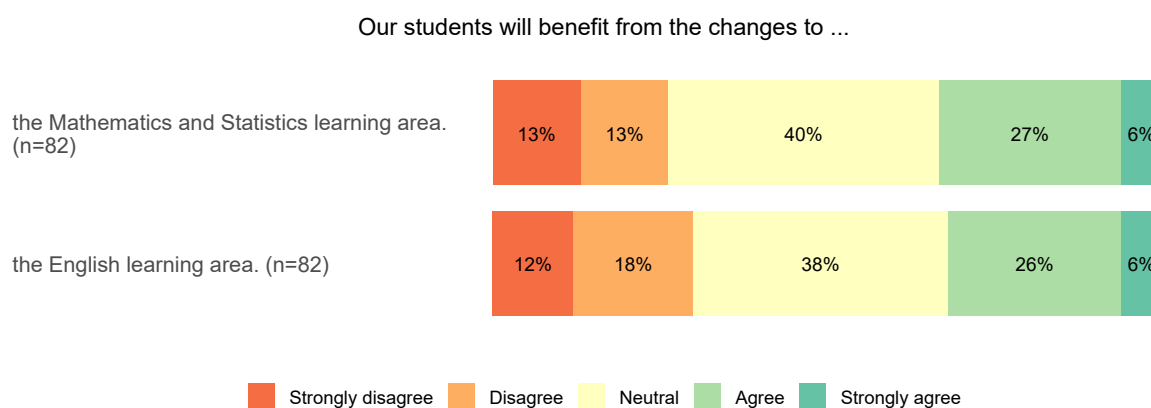


FIGURE 22 Principals’ views on the Mathematics and Statistics and English learning areas

**Principals emphasised challenges, with some emerging opportunities**

Thirty principals responded to an open question inviting any other comments about the updated New Zealand Curriculum changes. More than half expressed concerns. These included views that the changes were “rushed” or “imported” with inadequate consultation, that it was too prescriptive, not based on Aotearoa New Zealand evidence, and that it was not fit for purpose for learners in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Eleven comments focused on the pace of change and challenges for implementation:

Constant change with no consultation and no think time leads to disaster.

There have been so many changes it has been extremely difficult for staff and SLT [senior leadership team] to keep up. I have concerns about implementation timeframes. As a special character school we will need to integrate the change into our Montessori curriculum to ensure we are meeting both the New Zealand Curriculum requirements. We have already done a large amount of mahi based on previous drafts.

Related to this were concerns about consultation, stability, and trust in the change process:

The constant changes create a lack of trust.

Concerned that we appear to be importing a model of learning from other countries, instead of developing our own, that accurately reflects our bicultural country. I am also concerned that a focus on knowledge, at the expense of skills, isn’t setting our students up with capabilities necessary for our world. I don’t like the dichotomy with one approach being right and one approach being wrong. I would rather we looked at good practice across the educational spectrum, and continued to trust schools and teachers to deliver programmes that work for the students in their communities.

Eight principals also raised concerns about the design and direction of the curriculum:

Structured literacy will help the lowest and hold back the most capable. Adding the word ‘structured’ and the phrase ‘science of learning’ to political directives doesn’t make for good educational policy.

We had a robust junior curriculum with quality teaching and learning. The knowledge rich approach will compromise the quality of teaching and student engagement due to the quantity of content.

The level of prescription to learning reduces our ability to meet the needs of our community. Direction on the hours required is very worrying given the range of learning areas we see as important.

Four comments raised concerns about equity and cultural relevance:

Racist, non-New Zealand, narrow, bigoted and do not reflect New Zealand, does not pay homage to all curriculum areas.

It is not going to support the majority; it will support the elite.

Around seven principals gave a mixed response, seeing some potential benefits as well as areas of concern. Some felt it was too soon to say:

Unsure what benefits will emerge? Time will tell? Has caused a lot of stress with teachers.

Over time I think it might be beneficial. However, the huge gap between new and old will take time to close. The current Year 8 cohort are going to massively struggle.

Four comments were positive, highlighting perceived opportunities for improvement:

If primary schools and intermediates provide students at and above their chronological ages for literacy and numeracy we will be flying past these NCEA results.

Our staff in Maths and English are excited about the possibilities. They feel there are possibilities to really lift student engagement and reduce inequities. They realise it won't be perfect initially and are prepared to keep iterating to make it work.

## Teaching Aotearoa New Zealand's histories

At the time of this survey, the relatively new 2022 Aotearoa New Zealand's histories (ANZH) curriculum content was still being taught.<sup>36</sup> As we had included questions about this part of the curriculum in our last secondary national survey, we also included questions about this in 2025.

In the 2022 survey, we asked principals about their school's stage of implementation with ANZH in relation to MoE guidance (Ministry of Education, 2022). At that time, most reported that their schools were either just getting started (28%) or developing understandings and relationships (42%). Fewer said their schools were implementing ANZH (21%) or were already embedding and sustaining ANZH (9%). In 2022, 77% of principals said their staff had access to PLD to increase their knowledge of local and national histories, but fewer (49%) said their planning had involved input from local hapū and/iwi.

### ***Most principals were positive about the learning opportunities offered by ANZH***

In 2025, we modified our questions to reflect the changing context around ANZH<sup>37</sup> (Figure 23). Most principals (82%) indicated agreement that staff knowledge of local and national histories had grown. Almost as many indicated that their school's ANZH programme was offering rich learning experiences of national histories (79%) and local histories (78%). There was very little disagreement (2%) for each of these items.

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<sup>36</sup> Curriculum content for teaching ANZH was drafted in 2020, shared for feedback and trialling in 2021, and gazetted in 2022 for schools to begin using from 2023. For secondary schools, this was required to be taught up to Year 10.

<sup>37</sup> ANZH is being integrated into a new, broader social sciences curriculum. In early 2026 new content is out for consultation.

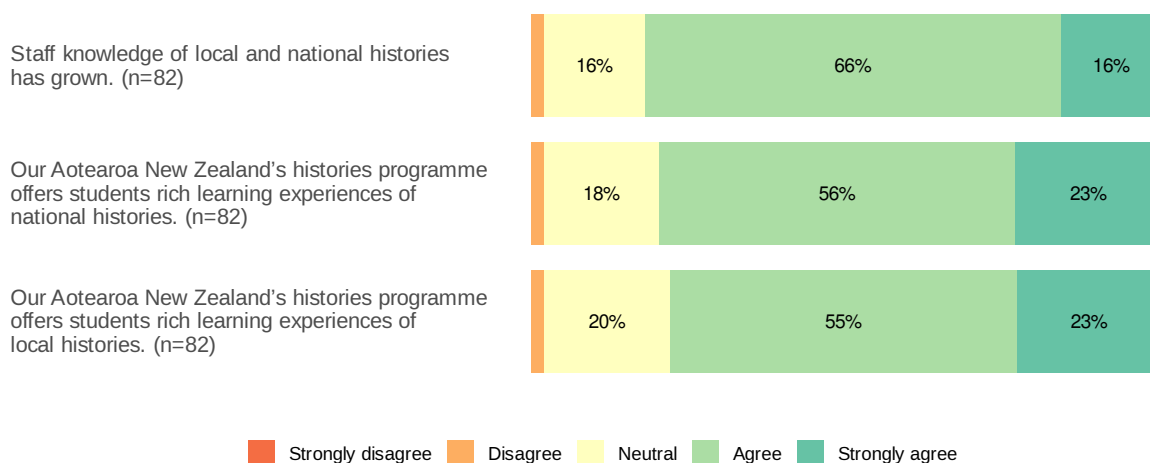


FIGURE 23 Principals' perspectives of teaching ANZH

### Assessment practices

This section draws on a set of new survey items exploring principals' views on using assessment information. These items are of interest in the current policy context, where there is a growing emphasis on curriculum clarity, assessment, and tracking student progress, alongside proposed changes to NCEA.

#### Assessment information was widely used

Figure 24 shows that nearly all principals (94%) reported using assessment information to identify and support students who need to make accelerated progress. A similar proportion of principals reported using assessment information to determine professional learning priorities (91%) and to inform resourcing decisions (89%). The lowest level of agreement was for using assessment information to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching (82%).

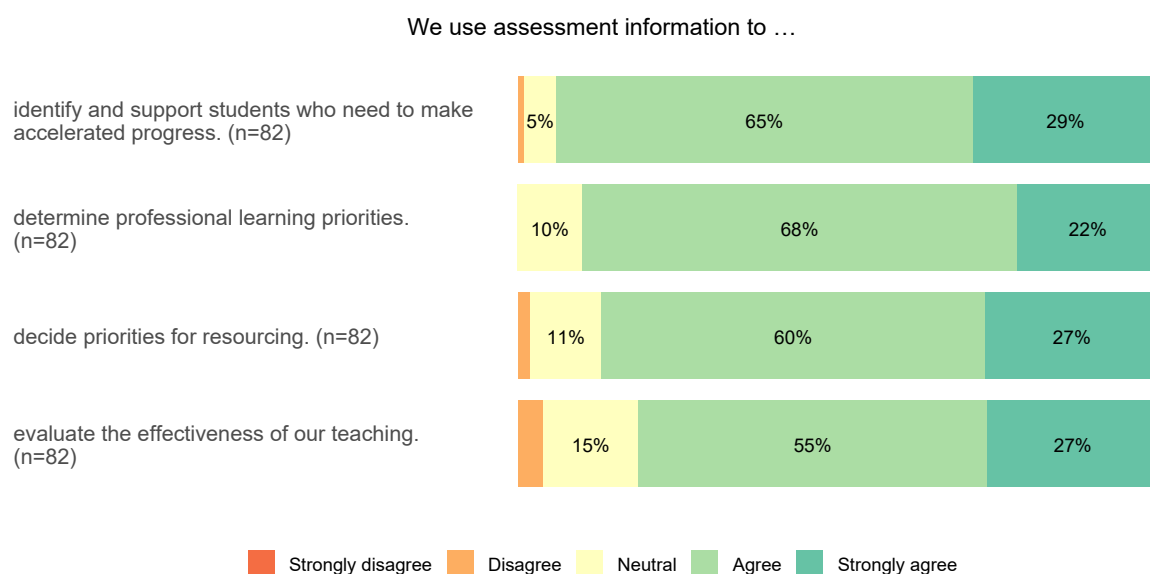


FIGURE 24 Principals' views on use of assessment information in their school

## Te whakaako me te ako | Teaching and learning

This domain asked principals about three areas of teaching and learning: Māori language learning, use of AI, and school-wide practices that support students, including timetabling and use of streaming or fixed-ability grouping. The teacher survey focused on teaching and learning at the individual teacher and classroom level (see MacDonald et al., 2026).

### Teaching and learning in te reo Māori

This section explores the provision of Māori language learning within secondary schools, including access to bilingual or immersion pathways, and how schools support and promote te reo Māori. 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. New items in 2025 examined whether schools provided ākonga the opportunity to learn in a reo Māori bilingual or immersion setting, as well as planning and resourcing for Māori language learning for both students and teachers.

#### ***Bilingual and immersion pathways are available in some schools, but are not widely established or expanding***

A total of 94 principals responded to questions about bilingual and immersion provision. Of these, 38% indicated their school provides opportunities for ākonga to learn in a reo Māori bilingual or immersion setting (Levels 1 and 2, where the curriculum is taught in te reo Māori for more than 12.5 and up to 25 hours per week), while 62% reported they did not offer these pathways.

Among schools that offered bilingual or immersion provision, just over half of principals (53%) reported having enough places for all ākonga who wish to enrol. However, one-quarter (25%) indicated that they do not have sufficient places, suggesting some unmet demand for Māori-medium learning in these settings. The remaining 22% were unsure.

In contrast, among schools that do not currently offer bilingual or immersion pathways, most principals (69%) reported that they are not actively planning to develop them. A small proportion (16%) indicated that they are planning to do so, while a similar proportion (16%) were unsure.

#### ***Te reo Māori is widely promoted, but whānau engagement and teacher capability planning were less consistently reported by principals***

Figure 25 shows that nearly all principals (91%) reported actively promoting te reo Māori in their school and local community, consistent with 2022 findings. Most principals (84%) also indicated that their school had a plan for students' Māori language learning, again consistent with 2022 findings.<sup>38</sup>

Most principals (80%) reported providing or funding PLD for te reo Māori (47% agreed, 33% strongly agreed), although this has decreased since 2022, when it was reported by 94% of principals. This decline was particularly seen in the proportion of principals who strongly agreed (52% in 2022, compared with 33% in 2025).

Most principals also agreed (63%) or strongly agreed (10%) that their school has a plan for teachers' Māori language learning. However, responses to this item were less strongly positive than for student-focused planning, with a higher proportion of neutrality and disagreement. Alongside the decline

<sup>38</sup> In 2022, the item was "We have a plan for te reo Māori teaching and learning". It did not specifically refer to students. Ninety percent of principals agreed or strongly agreed with this item in 2022.

in reported PLD provision, this suggests that building teacher capability in te reo Māori may be less consistently embedded across schools.

Whānau engagement in Māori language planning and programmes appeared more variable. While some principals reported active engagement (31% agreed, 6% strongly agreed), a relatively large proportion were neutral (34%) or disagreed (28%). This pattern is similar to 2022 and suggests that, while promotion of te reo Māori is widespread among responding schools, partnerships with whānau in shaping language programmes are not yet consistently evident across these schools.

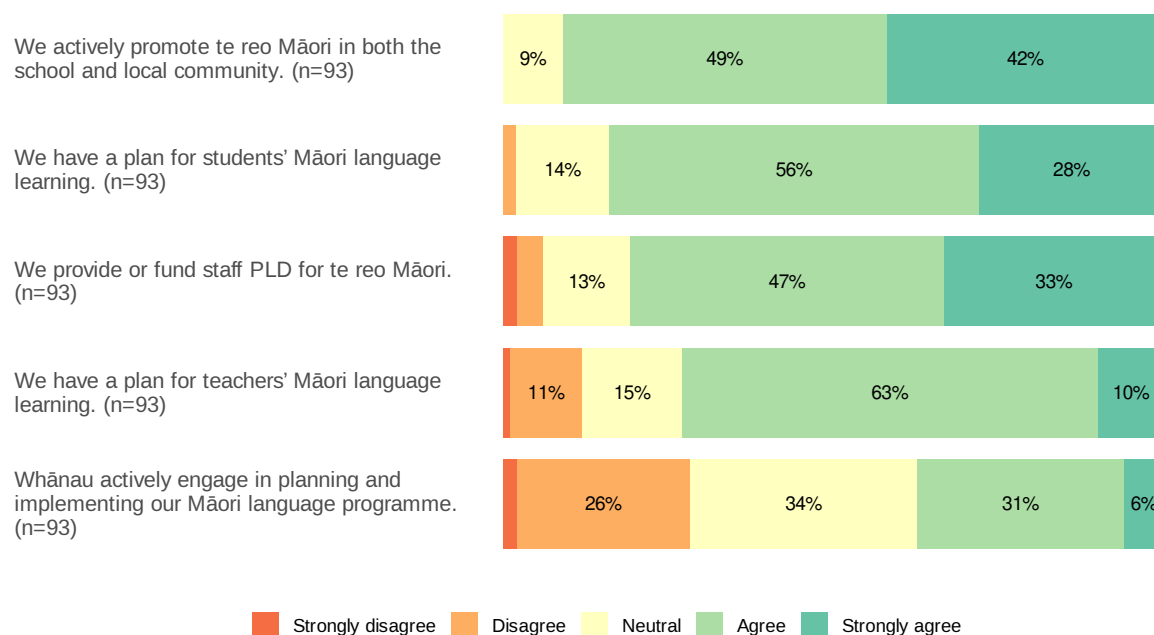


FIGURE 25 Principals' views on Māori language learning in their school

### Use of AI

Generative AI is becoming a more visible part of teaching, learning, assessment, and school administration. Schools are navigating this change while formal guidance is still developing and while available AI tools are changing quickly. MoE guidance currently encourages schools to take a practical, educative approach to AI use and to develop local policies that address purpose, risk mitigation, privacy, professional learning, and review (Ministry of Education, 2024c). For secondary schools, AI also intersects with assessment: schools with consent to assess listed standards are required to have an authenticity policy that includes acceptable use of AI, and generative AI tools are not permitted in NCEA external assessments (NZQA, 2025).

This context matters because the risks and opportunities of AI are not evenly distributed. AI tools can produce plausible but inaccurate outputs, may occasionally reuse personal or sensitive information entered into public tools, and may not always accurately reflect Indigenous knowledge, mātauranga Māori, te reo Māori, Pacific languages, or Polynesian cultures (Ministry of Education, 2024c).

**Principals are frequent users of AI**

Principals were asked how often they personally used AI tools. Two-thirds (69%) used AI tools either daily or several times a week, and a further 16% used AI tools weekly (Figure 26). Only 15% reported that they rarely or never used AI. This suggests that AI has already become part of most secondary school principals' professional practice.

This finding sits alongside the finding reported earlier in this report that more than half of principals (57%) identified AI in education as an area where they would like PLD for themselves. Taken together, the results suggest that use is already widespread among principals and likely growing in frequency, as most principals are users, but many see a need to develop their own knowledge and confidence. The survey did not ask principals *how* they were using AI, but teachers were asked about this in the teacher survey (MacDonald et al., 2026).

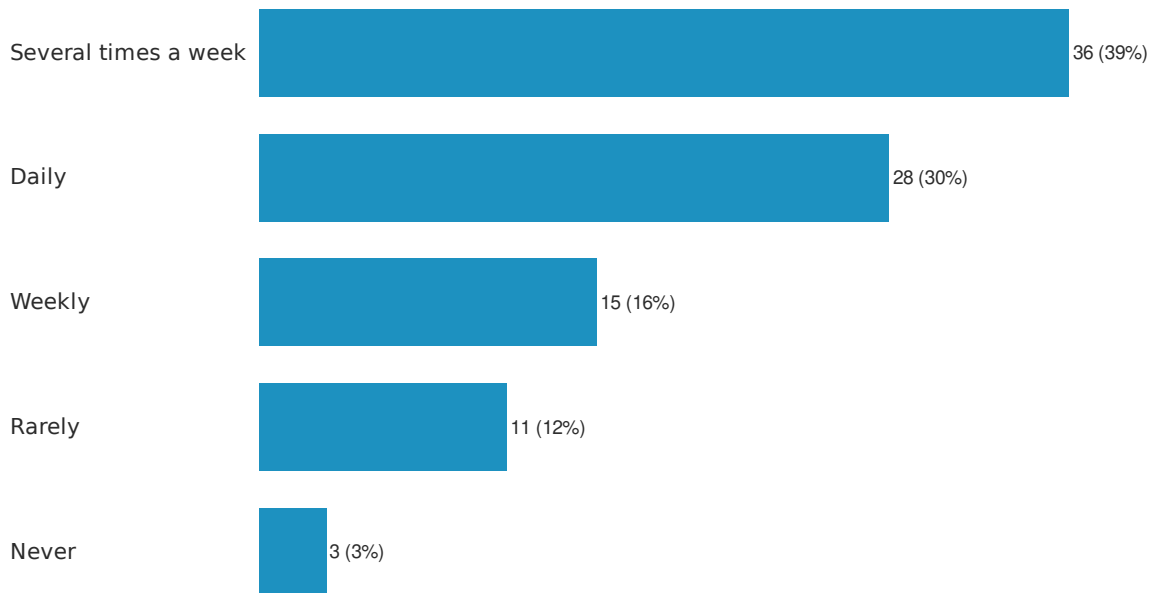


FIGURE 26 Principals' reported frequency of AI use (n=93)

**Schools were at different stages of responding to AI**

We asked principals whether their school had a written policy for students' and teachers' use of generative AI. More schools had a policy for students' use (51% of principals answered "yes" and a further 34% said this was "in development") than teachers' use (39% of principals answered "yes" and a further 38% said this was "in development").

Principals' responses to further items about the content of AI policies show that some expectations are already common, while others remain less settled. Among respondents to the teacher policy items, most (80%) said their school's policy prohibited teachers from entering personally identifiable student information into public AI tools, and only a few (6%) said it did not (Figure 27). This is an important safeguard, given concerns about privacy and how information entered into public AI tools may be reused. A similar pattern was evident for student use of AI, as most (77%) said their school's policy required students to acknowledge any generative AI assistance in their work, such as naming the tool and explaining how they used it (Figure 28).

Does your school's policy for teachers' use of generative AI prohibit entering personally identifiable student information into public AI tools? (n=71)

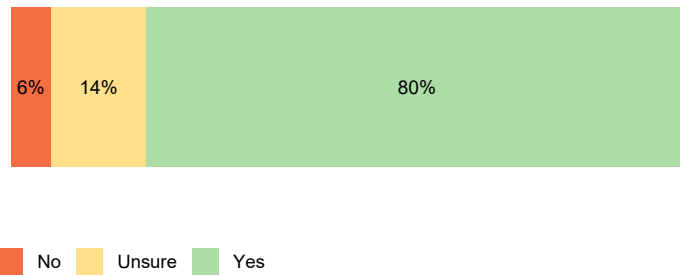


FIGURE 27 Principals' responses to whether teacher AI policy prohibits personally identifiable student information in public AI tools

Does your school's policy for students' use of AI require students to acknowledge any generative AI assistance in their work? (n=79)

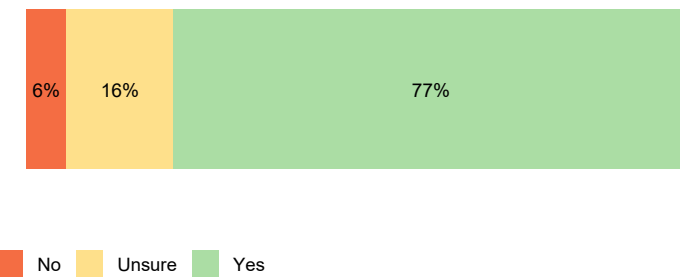


FIGURE 28 Principals' responses to whether student AI policy requires acknowledgement of generative AI assistance

Principals' reports on policy about teacher use of AI for marking and feedback was less consistent (Figure 29). Only about one in five (21%) said their policy required teachers to seek student permission if using AI for marking and feedback, while two-fifths (41%) said it did not and another two-fifths (38%) were unsure. This suggests that many schools may still be developing their stance on consent and communication when AI is used in teachers' assessment-related work. The survey responses suggest that privacy and student acknowledgement are becoming established in school policy, but consent around AI-assisted marking and feedback needs further attention.

Does your school's policy require teachers to seek student permission if using AI for marking and feedback? (n=71)

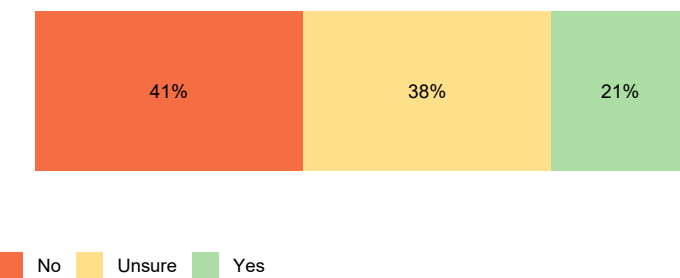


FIGURE 29 Principals' responses to whether teacher AI policy requires student permission for AI use in marking and feedback

**Access to school-provided AI tools was more common for teachers than for students, but funding is a constraint**

Principals were more likely to say their school provided access to generative AI tools for teachers than for students (Figure 30). Over two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that their school provided teachers with access to generative AI tools (69%). By comparison, just under half agreed or strongly agreed that their school provided all students with access to generative AI tools to support their learning (46%). One-third disagreed or strongly disagreed that all students had access (32%).

Funding was a clear gap. Only 19% of surveyed principals agreed or strongly agreed that their school had adequate funding to support AI use for teaching and learning, while just over half disagreed or strongly disagreed (52%). This pattern is consistent with previous Aotearoa New Zealand evidence that teachers and students may be experimenting with AI while access, school policy, resourcing, and professional learning remain uneven (Coblentz et al., 2025). In practice, limited funding may mean greater reliance on free tools, which can raise additional questions about privacy, age restrictions, model quality, and equitable access.

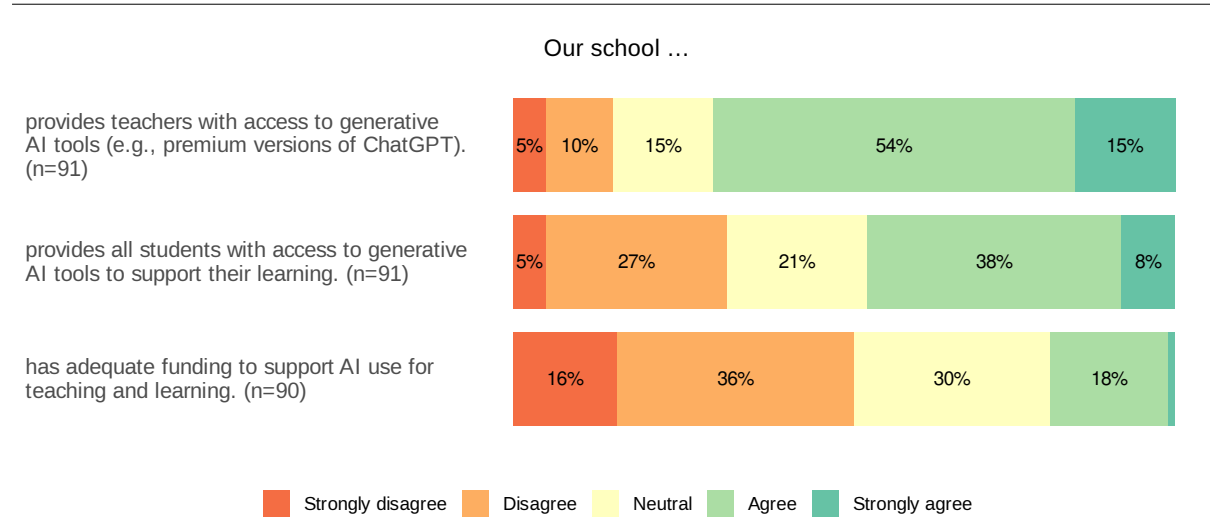


FIGURE 30 Principals' views on school access and funding for generative AI tools

**Principals were moderately confident in their school's AI awareness and communication**

Most principals were at least somewhat confident that staff understood the opportunities and risks of AI in education (Figure 31). Two-thirds (68%) agreed or strongly agreed that staff were aware of the opportunities and risks, while only one in 10 (10%) disagreed and one-fifth (22%) were neutral. Principals were slightly less confident about communicating their school's position on AI to staff, students, and whānau. More than half (58%) agreed or strongly agreed, 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and about a quarter (27%) were neutral.

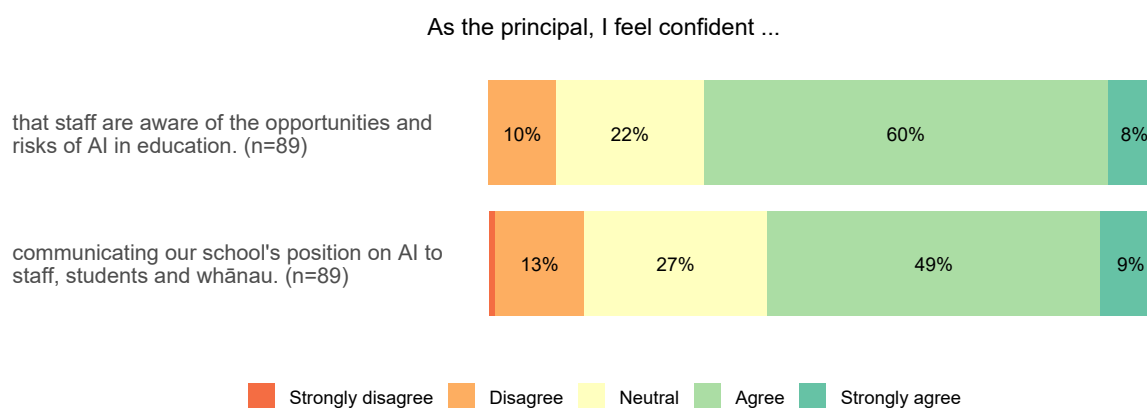


FIGURE 31 Principals' confidence in awareness of and communication about AI

These findings are broadly positive but also suggest that many schools are still consolidating their approach. The relatively high neutral responses indicate that many principals may not yet have a settled view of how well AI expectations are understood and communicated. Clear communication is important because AI use in schools is not only a matter of adopting tools. It also requires shared understandings about academic integrity, privacy, cultural bias, responsible use, student learning, and the role of professional judgement. As schools move beyond initial experimentation with generative AI tools, the need for consistent policy, teacher PLD, and effective communication with students and whānau is likely to become more pressing.

## Supporting students

Timetable clashes, streaming, and ability-grouping practices have traditionally created barriers for students in some subjects, courses, and pathways, particularly for students perceived to be of lower academic ability. Figure 32 and Figure 33 report principals' perspectives on how their school supports academic progress and the extent to which their timetable supports student subject choice. This section also reports on schools' use of streaming and fixed-ability grouping.

### ***More principals than in 2022 reported their school paid close attention to Years 9–10 students' academic progress, aspirations, and career goals***

Nearly all the principals (93%) agreed or strongly agreed that their school pays close attention to the progress of their Years 9–10 students (an increase from 83% in 2022). However, only 60% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that they were well informed of students' academic strengths and learning needs when they entered their school (an increase from 50% in 2022, but still down from 78% in 2018). Common practices are to ask Years 9–10 students about their aspirations and career goals so that they can align their subject selections and pathways accordingly (89%, up from 77% in 2022) and provide comprehensive career planning advice (88%).

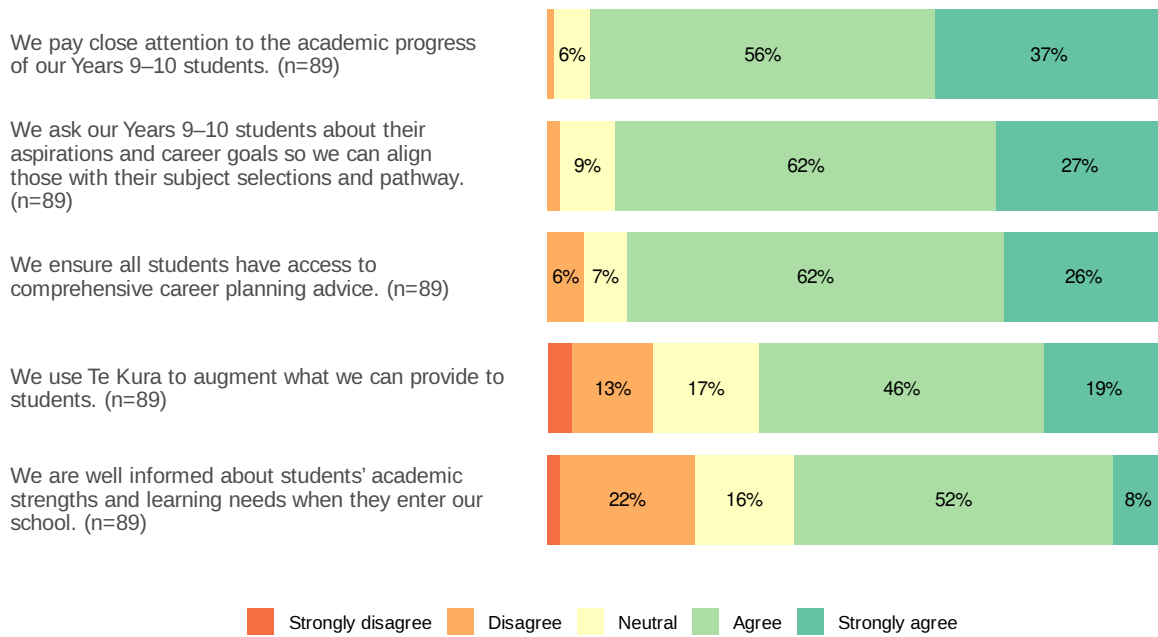


FIGURE 32 Principals' views on supporting students' academic progress, aspirations, and pathways

**Principals were positive about the opportunities offered by their school's timetable**

Nearly all principals were positive about how their school's timetable works (see Figure 33):

- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that their timetable allows students to choose subjects that aligned with their future career goals and aspirations
- 95% agreed or strongly agreed that it was flexible enough for academic and vocational subjects to be taken at the same time (an increase from 83% in 2022)
- 94% agreed or strongly agreed that most students could take subjects they are interested in.

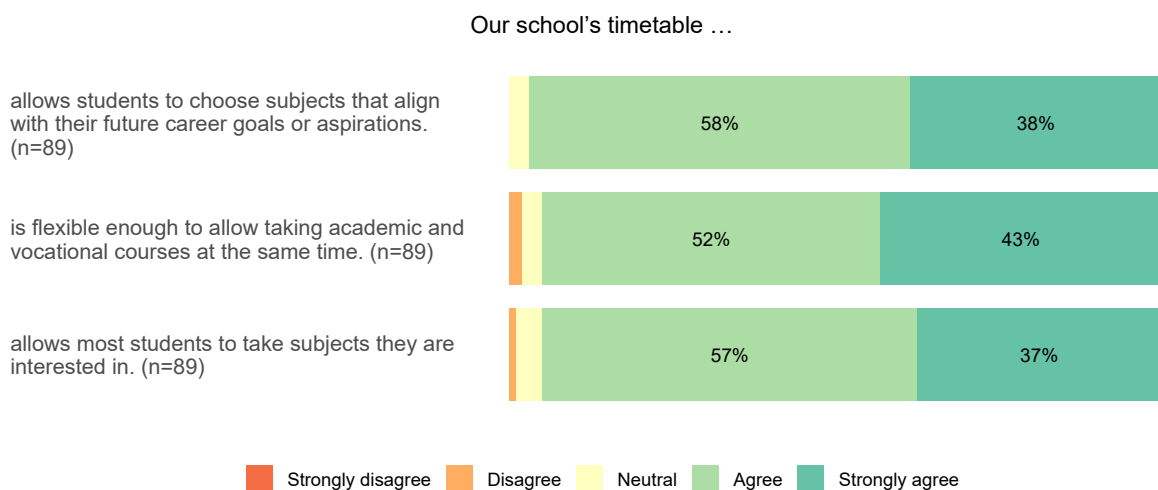


FIGURE 33 Principals' views on timetabling as support for teaching and learning

**Over two-thirds of schools did not use streaming or fixed-ability grouping, unchanged from 2022**

Most (69%) principals indicated they did not organise classes by ability in any learning areas and/or year levels, no notable change from 71% of principals who said that all classes in their school were mixed ability in 2022. The 31% who answered “yes” to using streaming or fixed-ability grouping were asked to describe which learning areas and/or year levels, and why this approach was taken.

The most common areas of learning mentioned were mathematics or numeracy (14 principals) and literacy (10 principals). A few mentioned science, “all core subjects”, or different academy or vocational pathways. For mathematics or numeracy, some form of grouping was most commonly reported for Years 9–10, though some principals reported this for Year 11. For literacy, the year levels involved were evenly distributed across Years 9–10, Years 11 and above, or weren’t clearly specified.

Principals described a range of different approaches to grouping. These included conventional ability streamed classes, extra or optional support classes for students who needed more help, and extension classes:

Sort of. We have a Year 9 class tailored for students with high anxiety. We also have a Year 9 extension class.

Streaming and banding at Years 9 and 10; accelerate classes in the senior school.

Extended Learning and Supported Learning. Both extremes of the academic spectrum.

Reasons for using these forms of streaming or ability grouping included supporting students who needed more assistance or more extension, ensuring students achieved their literacy and numeracy co-requisites or other NCEA requirements, and offering different pathways:

Students who do not have Lit/Num [co-requisites] are put into specific classes in Years 11 and 12, otherwise no streaming at junior or senior school.

We have two Year 12/13 Pathways: Academic and Service Academy.

Some said the new curriculum or teaching specifications required it, particularly for mathematics:

Senior subjects have entry requirements. New Year 9 curriculum structure has a transparent self-selection streaming component. Junior maths [is] streamed. It works.

In maths the students have such a range of ability that it is impossible to teach unless there is some grouping. Nothing is closed and movement takes place, so it is neither traditional streaming nor fixed.

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

This section reports on the Inclusion domain, beginning with principals’ perspectives on school-wide plans and processes that address discrimination and support inclusion, followed by their perspectives on students’ access to digital technologies. It then explores how effectively schools are enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi and embedding approaches to affirming the identities of ākonga Māori and Pacific students. Finally, we present key themes from qualitative open-ended questions that asked principals to tell us the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 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.

## Supporting anti-discrimination and inclusion

Working in schools to address discrimination and promote inclusion is vital to support young people's wellbeing and learning. Findings from the recent age 15 Growing up in NZ (GUINZ) study showed that experiencing any form of discrimination<sup>39</sup> impacts on students' wellbeing and learning. For GUINZ students, most of the discrimination they experienced occurred at school. In terms of wellbeing impacts, those who experienced discrimination also reported higher levels of depression, higher anxiety, lower mental wellbeing, and poorer peer relations (MacKenzie et al., 2026). These wellbeing impacts disproportionately affected students, such as rangatahi Māori, who are more likely to experience discrimination. In terms of learning outcomes, students who experienced any form of discrimination reported lower satisfaction with school and lower academic buoyancy (Neumann et al., 2026).

### ***Fewer principals agreed their school has well-embedded practices focused on inclusion and support for gender transitioning students and Rainbow students***

Our findings show that anti-discrimination practices are common in secondary schools. Nearly all principals agreed their school had well-embedded plans or processes for addressing comments or behaviour that are racist (96% in 2025; similar to 94% in 2022) or sexist, homophobic, or transphobic (93%, a new item in 2025) (see Figure 34).

Of note, however, is that in 2025 fewer principals agreed or strongly agreed with two items about the extent to which their school had well-embedded plans and processes to support two groups of students who are at risk of poorer wellbeing and learning outcomes:

- gender transitioning students (58% agreed or strongly agreed, down from 80% in 2022; while the proportion of principals who disagreed that they have well-embedded plans and processes to support gender transitioning students has remained stable, 35% selected neutral, compared with 11% in 2022)
- Rainbow (LGBTQIA+) students (73% agreed or strongly agreed, down from 84% in 2022; particularly notable is a decline in the proportion of principals who strongly agreed, going from 40% in 2022 to 22% in 2025).

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<sup>39</sup> Discrimination is defined as "being treated unfairly or differently compared to other people. These are some reasons why people may be discriminated against: age, skin colour, way of dress or appearance, race or ethnic group, accent or language spoken, gender, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, disability or health issues or any other reason" (MacKenzie et al., 2026, p. 3).

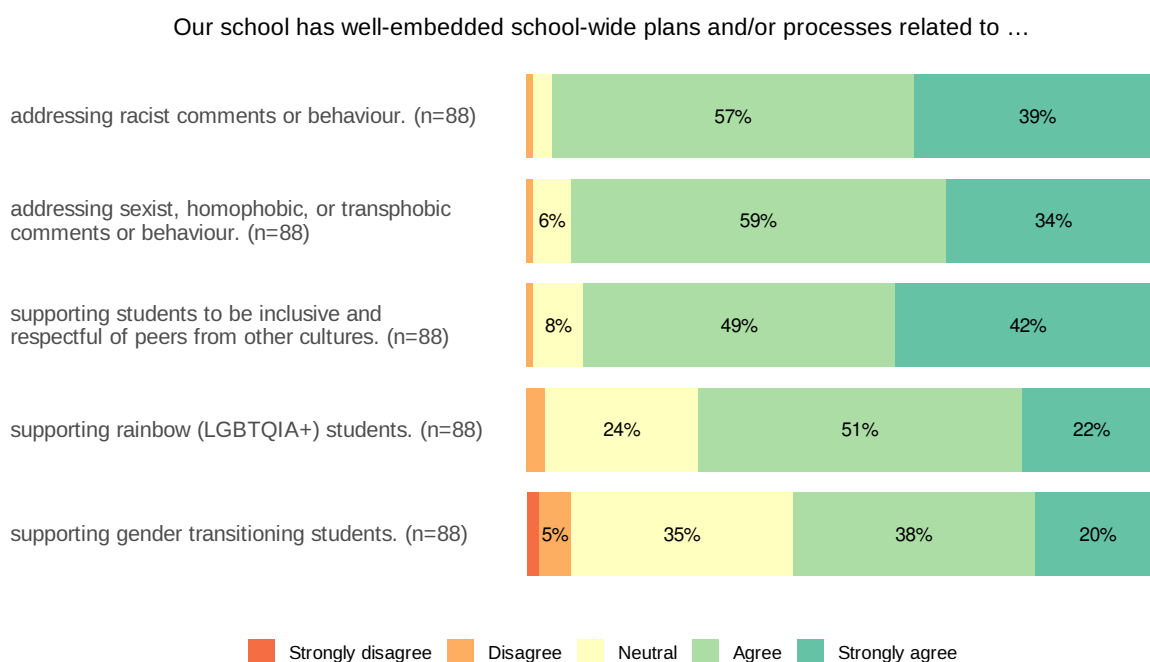


FIGURE 34 **Principals' views on schools having well-embedded plans and processes for addressing discrimination and promoting inclusion**

## Equitable access to digital technologies

Digital technologies are now part of most students' learning experiences, and access to devices and connectivity is an equity issue. This is becoming increasingly important as schools consider how more advanced digital tools, including generative AI, can support teaching and learning. In this section, we focus on principals' views of whether students in their school have good access to the technologies they need, both at school and at home.

### ***Most principals reported good access to assistive technologies, but home access to digital technologies was more uneven***

Figure 35 shows that most principals agreed or strongly agreed that students with learning support needs in their school had good access to assistive technologies to support their learning if needed (89%). Principals were less positive about students' internet connectivity and access to digital technologies at home. Just under two-thirds (64%) agreed or strongly agreed that students in their school had good home access, while a few (14%) were neutral and one in five (22%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.

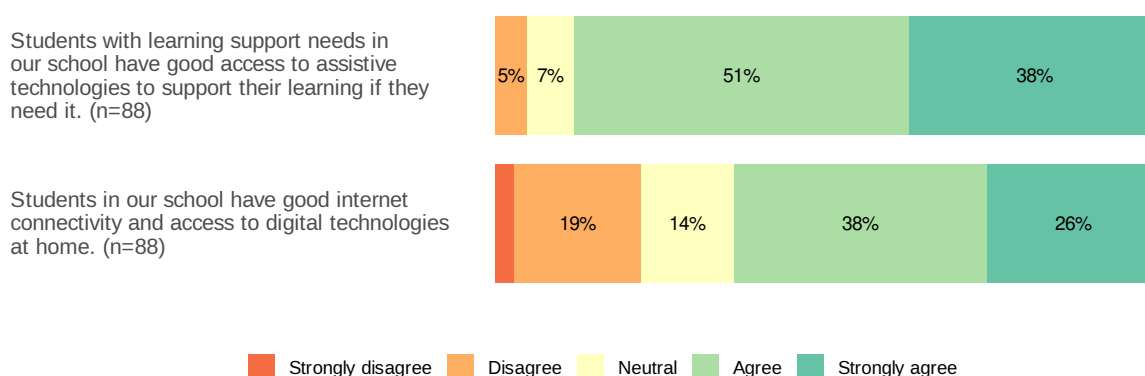


FIGURE 35 Principals' views on equitable access to technology

There were clear differences by school EQI group. Most (82%) principals in schools with fewer socioeconomic challenges agreed or strongly agreed that students had good internet connectivity and access to digital technologies at home. This was similar, though slightly lower, for principals in schools in the Moderate EQI group (76%). In contrast, only about one-quarter (23%) of principals in schools with more socioeconomic challenges agreed or strongly agreed, while half (50%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. These differences point to continuing inequities in students' access to the digital infrastructure needed to support learning beyond school.

## Enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi

This section explores the extent to which Te Tiriti o Waitangi is understood and enacted within schools. Aside from the item on schools actively exploring how to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (which was also asked in 2022), all items were new. Together, these questions examine principals' confidence in their own understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, as well as the extent to which Te Tiriti is reflected in school values, everyday practices, and shared across staff and governance.

### **Most principals reported strong confidence in understanding and enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

Very few principals disagreed with any of the statements about Te Tiriti o Waitangi, indicating a consistently positive pattern of responses (Figure 36). Nearly all principals agreed or strongly agreed (90%) that Te Tiriti o Waitangi is enacted in their school values and day-to-day activities. Similarly, most principals reported being confident in their own understanding of what it means to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi (87%; 36% agreed, 51% strongly agreed).

Most principals also indicated that their school actively explores how to honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi in their work (39% agreed, 45% strongly agreed). Responses to this item were broadly similar to 2022.

Most principals (78%) also agreed or strongly agreed that board members, school leaders, and teachers have a collective understanding of what giving effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi looks like in their school. However, compared to other items, this statement had a slightly higher proportion of neutral responses (16%) and disagreement (7%), suggesting that shared understanding across the wider school community may be less consistent.

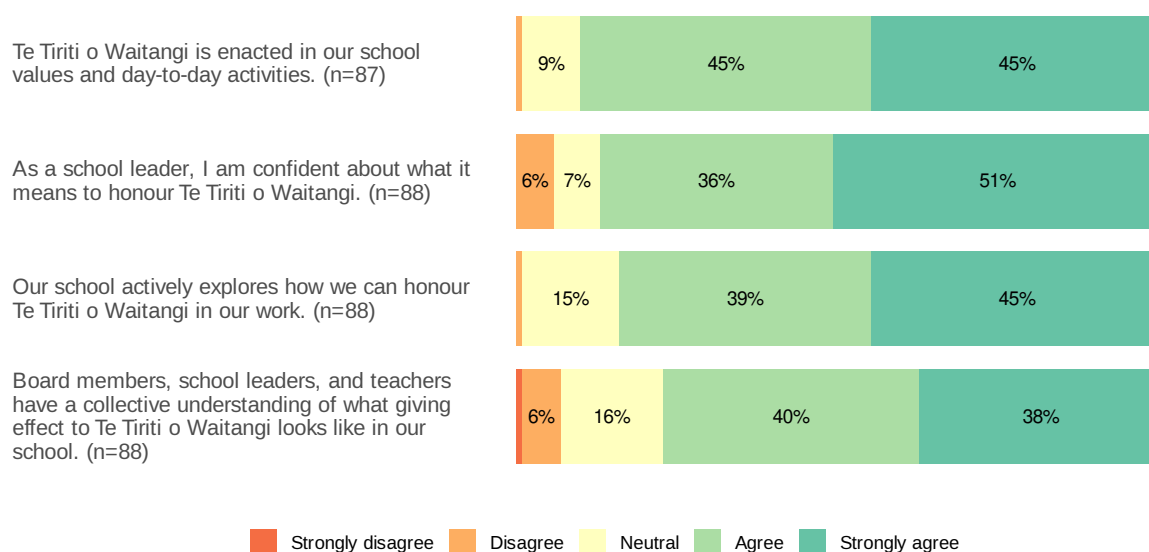


FIGURE 36 Principals’ views on enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi

### Affirming the identities of ākongā Māori

Principals responded to items about school-wide practices and approaches that allow ākongā Māori to experience success as Māori, such as visibility of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, and school-wide goals for ākongā Māori academic achievement, as well as cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing. Three of the items were new to the survey in 2025.

#### *Practices and approaches that affirm ākongā Māori identities were widespread*

Figure 37 below shows that nearly all principals (94%) reported that te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are incorporated into daily school-wide practices, an increase from 85% in 2022. No principals disagreed with this item (6% were neutral). Most principals also agreed or strongly agreed that:

- ākongā Māori have access to positive Māori role models (88%, an increase from 64% in 2022<sup>40</sup>)
- appropriate and safe pathways/processes were in place for ākongā Māori and their whānau to raise important issues (89%, similar to 81% in 2022)
- there are clear school-wide goals for the academic achievement of ākongā Māori (89%, no change from 2022).

For the new items, nearly all (93%) principals agreed or strongly agreed that ākongā Māori have access to co-curricular activities. Similarly, 89% agreed or strongly agreed that there are clear school-wide goals for the cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing of ākongā, and around three-quarters reported that their school supports ākongā Māori using the tuakana–teina approach.

40 In 2022, the wording was “Students have regular access to positive Māori community role models”. The change in wording may have contributed to the increase.

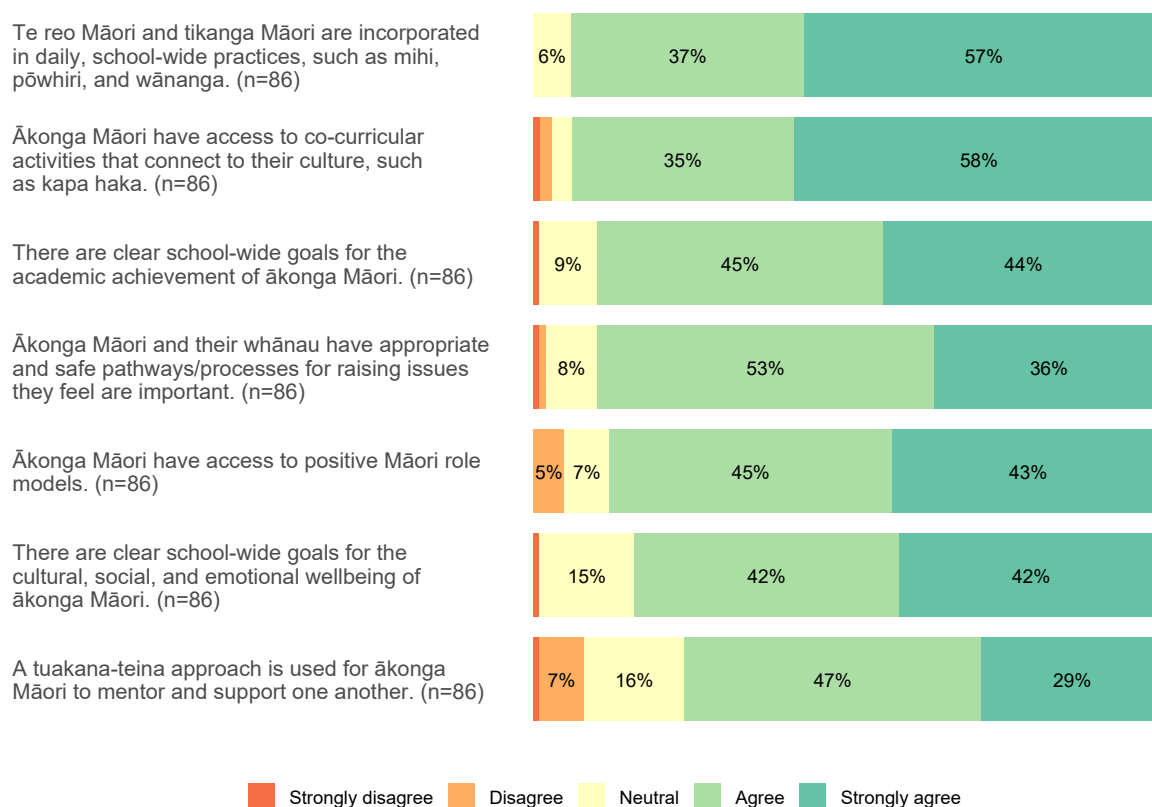


FIGURE 37 Principals' views on use of practices and approaches that affirm ākonga Māori identities

### 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 school-wide practices, school-wide goals, access to co-curricular activities connected to Pacific cultures, and use of Pacific ways of learning. This was only asked of principals who earlier responded that they currently had Pacific students in their school.

#### ***There is potential for more schools to introduce approaches that affirm the identities of Pacific students***

Figure 38 shows that most principals agreed or strongly agreed that Pacific students and their families have appropriate and safe pathways for raising issues they feel are important (74%). Around two-thirds of principals agreed or strongly agreed that:

- Pacific students have access to co-curricular activities connected to their culture (69%)
- their school has clear school-wide goals for Pacific students' academic achievement (69%)
- students have access to positive Pacific role models (68%)
- their school has clear school-wide goals for Pacific students' cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing (63%).

However, a minority of principals (8%–19% depending on the item) disagreed that a practice or approach was used at their school. There was a high use of “neutral”, perhaps indicating that principals were unsure about the extent to which this approach was evident in their school. This

was particularly evident for the extent to which Pacific cultural values, identities, and languages are incorporated in school-wide practices (32% neutral, 13% disagreed), and Pacific ways of learning are used by Pacific students to support each other (32% neutral, 17% disagreed).

Four of these items were also included in the 2022 survey, although in that cycle the question was answered by *all* principals, including those who did not have Pacific students in their school. This change limits comparison across time. However, all four items showed an increase in the proportion of principals who strongly agreed or agreed that a practice or approach was used.

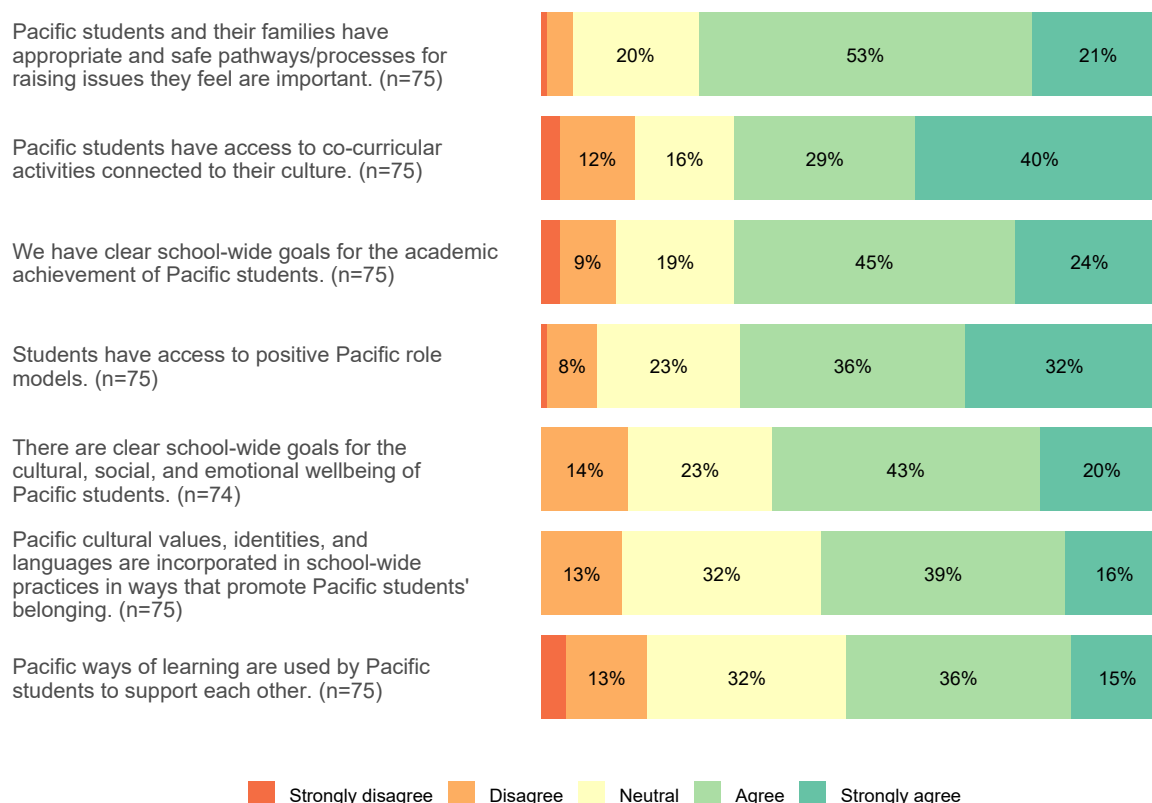


FIGURE 38 Principals' views on use of practices and approaches that affirm Pacific students' identities

### Improving equity

We asked principals to tell us the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to achieve equitable outcomes for four groups of students: ākongā Māori; Pacific students; students with additional learning support needs; and students with complex social and emotional needs.

Responses were analysed to identify key focus areas and initiatives that schools have implemented to support each of the four groups of students. 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. Note also that it was beyond the scope of the survey to consider how principals know whether and how an action was contributing to achieving equitable outcomes.

### ***Achieving equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori***

Seventy-one principals responded to this question, describing a wide range of approaches to achieve equitable outcomes for ākonga Māori. We identified seven themes:

- targeted support to lift achievement
- fostering belonging through school culture
- expanding kaupapa Māori curriculum pathways
- strengthening Māori leadership and staffing
- deepening whānau partnerships
- building capability through strategic focus
- building and maintain authentic links with iwi.

#### **Targeted support to lift achievement**

The most common focus was on targeted support for ākonga Māori (16 principals). This included approaches such as individual education plans (IEPs), Big Picture Learning, small-group literacy and numeracy interventions, closer tracking and monitoring of achievement data, and targeting students at risk of underachievement:

Stronger focus on numeracy and literacy while strengthening relationships between students and teachers.

Some principals described including more explicit teaching approaches, removing NCEA Level 1 as a qualification focus, and tasking heads of department with incorporating cultural connections into courses to better support Māori achievement.

#### **Fostering belonging through school culture**

A similarly prominent theme was strengthening school culture (14 principals). Principals described embedding tikanga Māori and te ao Māori across the school, including through pōwhiri, waiata, noho marae, Matariki celebrations, and increasing the visibility and everyday use of te reo Māori. Some introduced kaupapa Māori form classes. Some principals also highlighted the implementation of school-wide restorative and kanohi ki te kanohi approaches, and the importance of Māori staff as role models. These initiatives created environments where ākonga Māori had access to their culture, could see themselves reflected in the school setting, and experienced a stronger sense of belonging:

Increased awareness and use of appropriate tikanga at school. Authentic use of te reo in and around school.

Student feedback on where they cannot see we are Māori, Māori advisory group [with] board, students, and staff.

#### **Expanding kaupapa Māori curriculum pathways**

Curriculum developments focused on expanding access to kaupapa Māori learning opportunities was another theme (12 principals). This included introducing or strengthening courses such as Te Ao Haka, toi Māori (e.g., carving), and making te reo Māori compulsory in some contexts. Six principals described the development of Māori-medium and bilingual pathways, including rumaki, reo rua, and wharekura provision.

### **Strengthening Māori leadership and staffing**

Some principals highlighted the importance of staffing and leadership (11 principals), including appointing Māori deans, kaiārahi, or senior leaders, and employing more Māori staff as cultural and academic role models. In some cases, additional support was provided to Māori staff to enable their leadership of initiatives such as kapa haka and cultural programmes. Increasing leadership opportunities for ākonga Māori was another focus.

### **Deepening whānau partnerships**

Whānau engagement was a key area for 10 principals, who described the establishment of whānau groups, regular hui, and efforts to strengthen partnerships with whānau in supporting student learning:

Continuing to strengthen our whānau hui group, we try to meet at least once a term and sometimes twice ... Close monitoring of academics and introduction of extracurricular kapa haka as requested by whānau to build leadership, confidence and a sense of belonging.

### **Building capability through strategic focus**

Other areas of focus included PLD for staff (eight principals), with programmes such as Niho Taniwha, Poutama Pounamu, and Te Ahu o te Reo Māori used to build staff capability; and strategic planning (seven principals), where Māori success was embedded as a priority through dedicated strategies, goals, and monitoring:

One pou of our strat[egic] plan. [It's a] big focus, priority for the leadership of the school, connecting with whānau and iwi a priority.

Tikanga and raising profile of te ao Māori. Strategic outcomes published by the parent whānau rōpū and presented to [the board].

Requiring all departments to have a goal around improving Māori achievement.

### **Building and maintaining authentic relationships with hapū and iwi**

Five principals described their focus on working with hapū and iwi, including through formal partnerships and ongoing relationship building:

Engaging regularly, authentically, and with reciprocity with mana whenua.

Kapa haka was also seen as a space for building confidence, leadership, and belonging, and engaging with hapū, iwi, and mana whenua.

### ***Achieving equitable outcomes for Pacific students***

Fifty-five principals chose to tell us about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific students. Five themes emerged from their responses:

- growing staff capacity and capability
- enhancing teaching and learning provision
- strengthening relationships with families
- visibility of Pacific peoples and cultures
- high aspirations and expectations.

### **Growing staff capacity and capability**

Sixteen principals described having employed more Pacific staff members, including mentors, teachers, and kaiārahi or liaison roles. Multiple responses referred to a Pacific dean, suggesting that schools see particular value in resourcing this role focused on pastoral care, academic monitoring, and wellbeing of Pacific students. A few principals framed growing Pacific staff as “strong role models” for Pacific students.

A few principals also mentioned high-quality PLD for teachers and school leaders, with specific mention of the Tapasā framework<sup>41</sup> and the Lalaga Tautua leadership programme, part of Tautai o le Moana.<sup>42</sup>

### **Enhancing teaching and learning provision**

Teaching and learning provision was also a clear theme in principals' thoughts on the most effective thing their school had done to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific students. The diverse responses (most only described by one or two principals) included: increasing provision of Pacific studies and languages; removing NCEA Level 1; adopting the Cambridge curriculum; adopting a “knowledge rich curriculum and explicit teaching”; and providing after-school tutoring or a homework hub. A few principals said their school had implemented targeted interventions and had introduced mentor/whānau classes for Pacific students, led by Pacific teachers.

### **Strengthening relationships with families**

A similar proportion highlighted building relationships with families as the most effective thing they had done for Pacific students in the past 3 years. Many responses in this theme referred to a Pacific parents' association or group, but two responses illustrated this theme in schools with few Pacific students:

Very low number but making certain to acknowledge them as a group more and encouraging their whānau to become more engaged in the college.

We have two Pacific families, so it has been around building relationships.

Celebrating Pacific students' success with parents and families through dinners and “success evenings” was also visible in this theme.

### **Visibility of Pacific cultures within the school**

Co-curricular activities such as cultural groups for Pacific students were often mentioned alongside other things schools were doing (within the themes discussed above). Cultural performances were one way that Pacific cultures had visibility within a school. Responses from a few principals showed how this was the main thing occurring in schools with fewer Pacific students:

We only have 10 Pacific students so nothing specific; however, they can present an item relating to their culture at our Cultural Evening.

There are very few Pacific students in the school, but they have had opportunities to share their culture and take Tongan and Samoan via NetNZ.

Some schools had also increased the visibility of Pacific cultures within the school in broader ways such as having Pacific student leaders, increasing greetings, school songs, and attendance at the Pacific Fusion secondary school festival:

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41 <https://teachingcouncil.nz/en/grow-my-practice/professional-learning/tapas-for-teachers-of-pacific-learners>

42 <https://www.tolm.co.nz/about>

Committing to and attending [the] Pasifika Fusion festival. [This] really established a sense of pride and belonging as Pasifika is less than 5% of our student population.

### **High expectations**

Five principals made a comment related to academic success for Pacific students at their school, such as high NCEA and University Entrance (UE) pass rates. As this was in response to the question about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific students, we have identified this theme as having high expectations, summed up by this comment from one principal:

Aspirational goal setting that matches Pākehā outcomes.

### ***Achieving equitable outcomes for students with additional learning support needs***

Seventy principals commented on the most effective things their school had done to achieve equitable outcomes for students with additional learning support needs. There were four themes:

- growing staffing and resourcing
- strengthening processes
- modifying learning spaces
- connections.

### **Growing staffing and resourcing**

Over half of those who responded to this question (40 principals) mentioned the levels of staffing and resourcing that had been directed towards learning support, including redirection of board funding. Principals described employing specialist staff—Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), Learning Support Coordinators (LSC), and literacy and numeracy specialists, as well as additional teacher aides (TA) and learning assistants:

Employing board-funded teacher aides in every junior mainstream English and Maths class.

[We] over resource Learning Support, shifting funding from buying material to funding teacher aides and human resources.

Employed a numeracy support teacher specifically for numeracy.

Some principals also mentioned provision of “group” and “whole-staff” PLD for teachers and/or teacher aides.

### **Strengthening processes**

More than a third of responses (25 principals) described processes implemented within their schools. This included processes for identifying and tracking students who needed additional support, individual learning plans, and wraparound support:

Careful tracking of students, providing SAC [special assessment conditions] for Lit/Num and ensuring alternative pathways.

Developed a thorough process of planning and tracking progress for these students.

Developing effective teamwork within staff to provide supports.

### **Modifying learning spaces**

Some schools had established dedicated or modified classes or spaces for students with additional learning support needs:

The creation of a home base space ... that can be a base to leave from to learning opportunities in the wider school with core learning taught in a supported environment.

Two low-sensory classrooms.

The creation of a multi-disciplinary Hauora space for health, pastoral, and counselling away from the front office.

Establish a homeroom classroom for those working at curriculum L1 or L2 when entering high school.

### **Connections**

A minor theme (five principals) related to connections, including strong connections with Kāhui Ako, primary schools, and special schools. Some principals mentioned strong internal school relationships, including with whānau:

Strong connections with Kāhui Ako, LSC, RTLB and SENCO provision and ORS [Ongoing Resourcing Scheme], our high needs learning support unit and SENCO.

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

Sixty-three principals described the most effective things their school had done to achieve equitable outcomes for students with complex social and emotional needs. Three main themes emerged from their responses, consistent with those in the section above:

- strengthening processes
- growing personnel capacity and capability
- strengthening connections.

### **Strengthening processes**

Just over half of those who responded to this question (33 principals) reported they had strengthened school processes, mostly commonly towards a holistic team approach to pastoral care and learning support (21 principals):

Student Support Network—weekly meets—front footing issues with Deans, counsellors, key staff and SLT, Tu Whānau, Rangatahi Dean.

Increased use of SENCO and TA, clear strategic focus, increased pastoral team approach and embedding restorative practice.

Also common was embedding wraparound processes such as improving individual learning plans (seven principals) or interagency support through referrals to government agencies and community providers (five principals):

Having hui to determine individual plans and responses.

Continue to use personalised learning and education documents (PLED) to build staff capacity to work with these students in appropriate ways.

Supported Learning Department which encompasses all of this from testing, interventions and resourcing for these students.

Smaller numbers of principals reported actions such as changing spaces to be better suited to students or improving how they tracked and targeted students:

The creation of a multi-disciplinary hauora space for health, pastoral and counselling away from the front office.

Better targeting/tracking of students (e.g., Kamar, small group intervention).

Careful pastoral tracking and support using a Fragility Scale.

#### **Growing personnel capacity and capability**

The next most common action, mentioned by just under half of those who responded (30 principals), was increasing pastoral or learning support team capacity. Increasing counselling capacity was most often mentioned (12 principals):

Have utilised the pastoral care allowance but we already overstaff our guidance counsellors and pastoral support team.

Some principals organised more social workers, youth workers, teaching assistants, and whānau support workers, or staff with expertise in working with students with extra support needs:

[We] over resource pastoral team, shifting funding from buying materials to funding pastoral staff, including a social worker and mental health advocate.

Nine principals described that the most effective thing they had done was PLD for staff. This came from external experts (e.g., trauma-informed approaches through Kāhui Ako or a child psychologist) or their own internal counsellors or SENCO:

When we can access it, get reputable PLD for all staff. Support our SENCO in her work and make PLD opportunities available to her, so that she can facilitate growth and development for staff.

#### **Strengthening connections**

The third action to achieve equitable outcomes was drawing on a range of relationships and connections to improve support for students with complex social and emotional needs. This was mentioned by 11 principals (nearly one-fifth of those who responded to this question). Principals strengthened connections with three main groups: whānau; external agencies and initiatives; and local schools:

School counsellor, whānau and staff working closely together, ensuring the student knows we understand them and care.

Our LSC is amazing and our links to primary schools via Kāhui Ako. Great transition structures.

Strong whānau relationship within our Manaaki system. Whānau conferences to set goals, celebrate learning and ensure support.

## **Te toiora | Wellbeing**

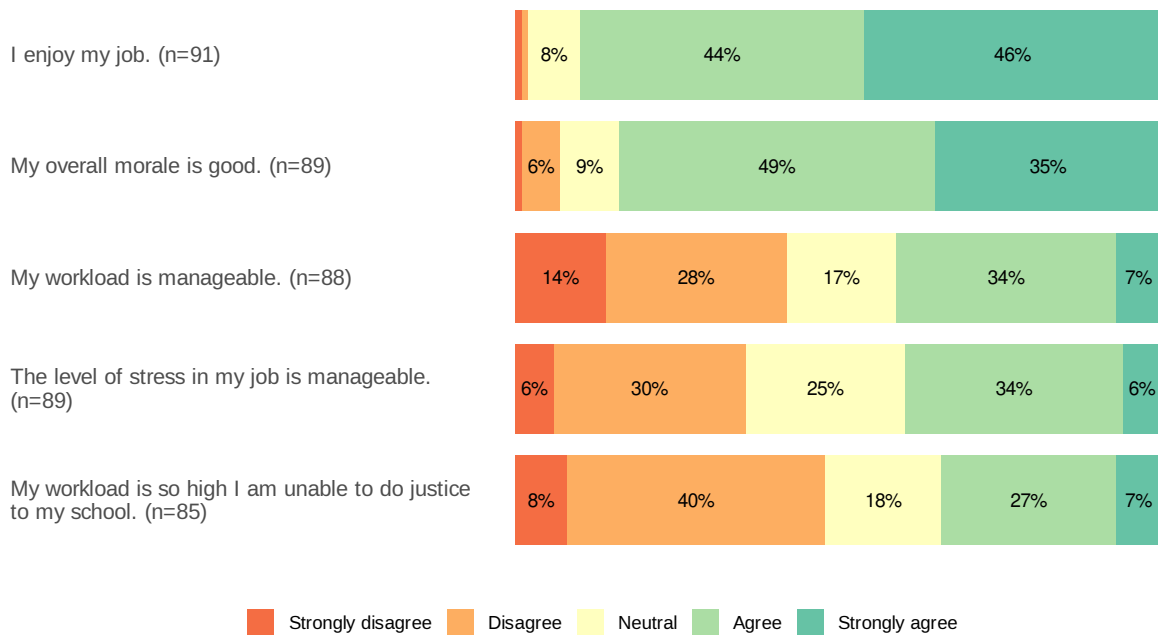
The Wellbeing domain asked principals about their own wellbeing (e.g., stress, job satisfaction, workload), as well as their school's approaches to supporting student wellbeing. All of these have been the focus of questions in previous cycles of the national survey, allowing us to report on trends over time.

#### **Principal wellbeing**

The NZCER national survey has asked principals about their job enjoyment, morale, and workload for multiple cycles. Unions and principal groups also survey their members on these issues from time to time, the inclusion in each cycle of the national survey presents the opportunity for analysis of long-term trends.

**More principals were positive about their job, morale, and levels of workload and stress**

Figure 39 shows that, in 2025, nearly all principals (90%) agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed their job.<sup>43</sup> This is an increase from the 80% who agreed or strongly agreed in 2022, and a return to the 2018 figure of 93% (see Table 7). Most principals also agreed or strongly agreed that their overall morale was good (84%), up from just two-thirds in 2022. Also of note is the positive shift in the proportion of principals who strongly agree that they enjoy their job (30% in 2022, 46% in 2025) and that their morale is good (17% in 2022, 35% in 2025).



**FIGURE 39 Principals' views on enjoyment of their job, morale, stress, and workload**

Principals enjoy their job despite challenges with stress and workload, highlighted by the sizeable proportion of principals who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the manageability of their workload and stress level. However, as with job enjoyment and morale, a positive shift is also evident in principals' responses to these items. Table 7 shows that the highest proportion of principals in a decade strongly agreed or agreed that their workload is manageable; 41% in 2025, compared with just 9% in 2022, 22% in 2018, and 36% in 2015. The proportion of principals who strongly agreed or agreed that their level of stress is manageable also increased from 24% in 2022 to 40% in 2025.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> This is very similar to the 2024 primary principal survey, when 89% of primary principals strongly agreed or agreed that they enjoyed their job, and 78% strongly agreed or agreed that their overall morale was good.

<sup>44</sup> Prior to 2022, principals were asked about their stress levels using a different scale that makes comparison difficult.

One possible explanation for the positive shift in these aspects of principals' wellbeing is a COVID effect, with principals' completing the survey in 2022 dealing with the effects of online learning arrangements, the vaccine mandate, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on their staff, students, and communities.

TABLE 7 **Principals' perceptions of enjoyment, morale, stress, and workload, 2015–25 (% strongly agreed and agreed)**

Item	2015 (n=182)	2018 (n=167)	2022 (n=41)	2025 (n=91)
I enjoy my job	91	93	80	90
My overall morale is good	77 <sup>45</sup>	61 <sup>45</sup>	66	84
The level of stress is my job is manageable	*	*	24	40
My workload is manageable	36	22	9	41

\* = not asked

### ***A sizeable proportion of principals did not have manageable workload or stress levels and reported they were unable to do justice to their school***

Although this section shows a positive shift in the proportion of principals who have good morale, with manageable workload and stress levels, this was not the situation for all principals in 2025:

- 42% of principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that their workload is manageable
- 36% of principals disagreed or strongly disagreed that their level of stress is manageable (and another 25% were neutral)
- 34% strongly agreed or agreed that their workload is so high they are unable to do justice to their school.

This final item was included for the first time in 2022, when 22% of principals strongly agreed or agreed that their workload is so high they are unable to do justice to their school. This increased to 34% in 2025 (a percentage increase is a negative shift for this item). Of note is that 7% of principals strongly agreed with this item in 2025, whereas in 2022 no principals strongly agreed. Fewer principals also selected the neutral response in 2025, suggesting they had clearer views on whether their workload was too high to do justice to their school.

Nearly all (90%) of the principals who agreed or strongly agreed that their workload is too high to do justice to their school also reported a workload that is unmanageable, adding to the picture that there is a group of principals whose workload is unsustainable.

### ***Most principals worked at least 56 hours per week, with 12% working over 70 hours***

We asked principals approximately how many hours they work, including meetings, contact with trustees, and contact with parents and whānau (i.e., all the work they do for the school). Table 8 shows that the overall picture has changed little in the past decade. Most principals carry out their role by working 56 hours or more per week. This has varied very little since 2015: 85% worked more than 56 hours in 2015; 87% did so in 2018; 89% did so in 2022, and 82% did so in 2025.

<sup>45</sup> A different scale was used in 2015 and 2018. This is the proportion of principals who rated their overall morale as “very good” or “good”.

In 2025, 17% of principals worked under 56 hours per week and 12% worked over 70 hours per week (no notable change from 2022). The majority (70%) worked between 56 and 70 hours per week.

TABLE 8 Principals' working hours per week, 2015–25

Hours per week	2015 (n=179)	2018 (n=167)	2022 (n=45)	2025 (n=91)
Less than 40	0%	0%	0%	1%
41–50	2%	3%	2%	4%
51–55	12%	9%	9%	12%
56–60	18%	22%	38%	25%
61–65	18%	24%	20%	26%
66–70	24%	25%	20%	19%
71–80	17%	14%	9%	9%
Over 81	8%	2%	2%	3%

### ***Most principals had support and were optimistic and confident about the year ahead***

The final question about principals' wellbeing looked ahead, asking about support, optimism and the change (Figure 40). A majority of principals (77%) felt supported by their school board and also strongly agreed or agreed that they got the internal support to do their job effectively (71%).

Similarly, 73% strongly agreed or agreed that they were optimistic about the year ahead and felt confident in tackling new challenges or changes that the school may face. This is a very similar picture to 2022.

As in 2022, an item that sought principals' views about upcoming initiatives, or policy changes that could impact the school and their work, received more varied responses. Just over half of the principals (53%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had a clear idea of these changes, while one-fifth responded neutrally, and 27% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

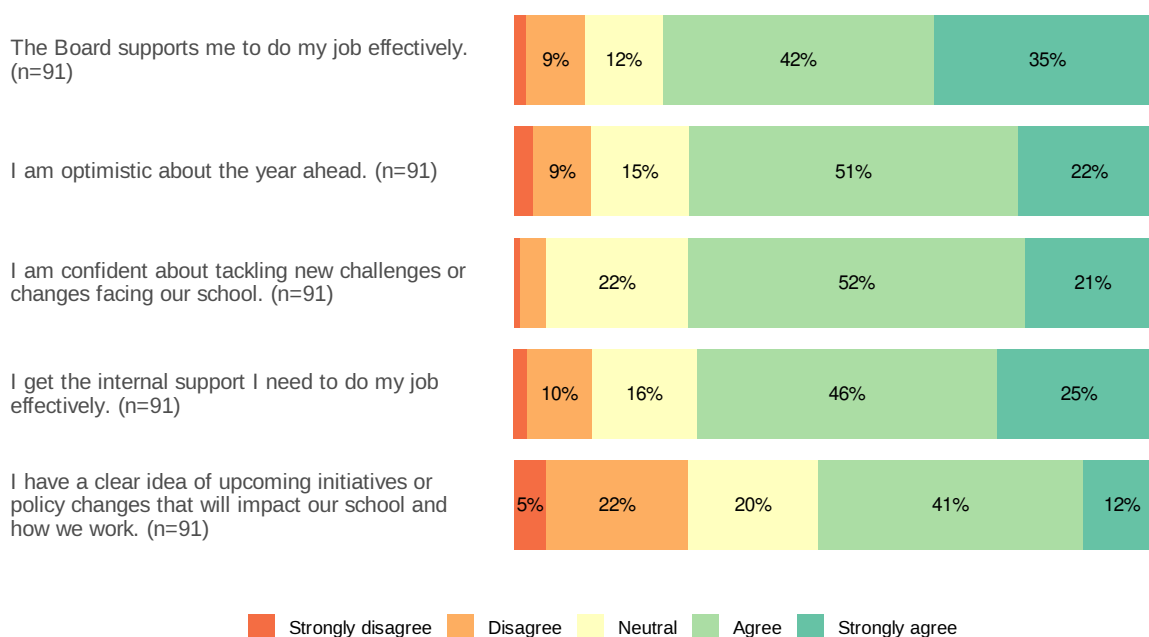


FIGURE 40 Principals' views on the future

### Student wellbeing

Over the past two decades, there has been a growing awareness of the interrelationships between wellbeing and learning. Since 2015, the national survey has increased the focus on questions relating to students' opportunities to learn about wellbeing and school-wide supports for wellbeing.

#### *Opportunities to learn about the impact of the online world on wellbeing is a growing focus in schools*

As shown in Figure 41, over two-thirds of principals agreed that students had access to all the listed wellbeing learning opportunities. Recently there has been public consultation about relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in schools (NZCER, 2025) to inform the draft Health and Physical Education learning area. The Years 0–10 overview states that “to keep young people safe, consent education will be mandatory” (Ministry of Education, 2025, p. 1). Figure 41 suggests that consent education is already relatively widespread in secondary schools with nearly all principals reporting students had opportunities to learning about:

- safe relationships and consent (90%)
- relationship strategies such as building friendships (90%).

Fewer principals agreed that students were offered learning relating to the online world; for example, less than three-quarters (73%) reported students were able to learn about strategies to raise awareness about and manage online harm. Earlier (see Figure 12) we reported that 38% of principals indicated that managing the influence of social media extremism is an issue for their school. However, the proportion of principals who agreed that students had opportunities to learn about the healthy use of digital devices had increased substantially from the 2022 survey (82%, up from 62%), suggesting there is growing awareness of the need for focused learning relating to the online world. This learning is particularly important to support students' wellbeing given growing international evidence of decreases in young people's mental health and wellbeing linked to social media use (Helliwell et al., 2026).

Opportunities to learn about gender identity and diverse sexualities were also less common than other areas, with around three-quarters of principals (76%) reporting students had these opportunities. This aspect of wellbeing education is complex for schools to manage owing to polarised views about whether or how these learning experiences should be offered in schools (NZCER, 2025).

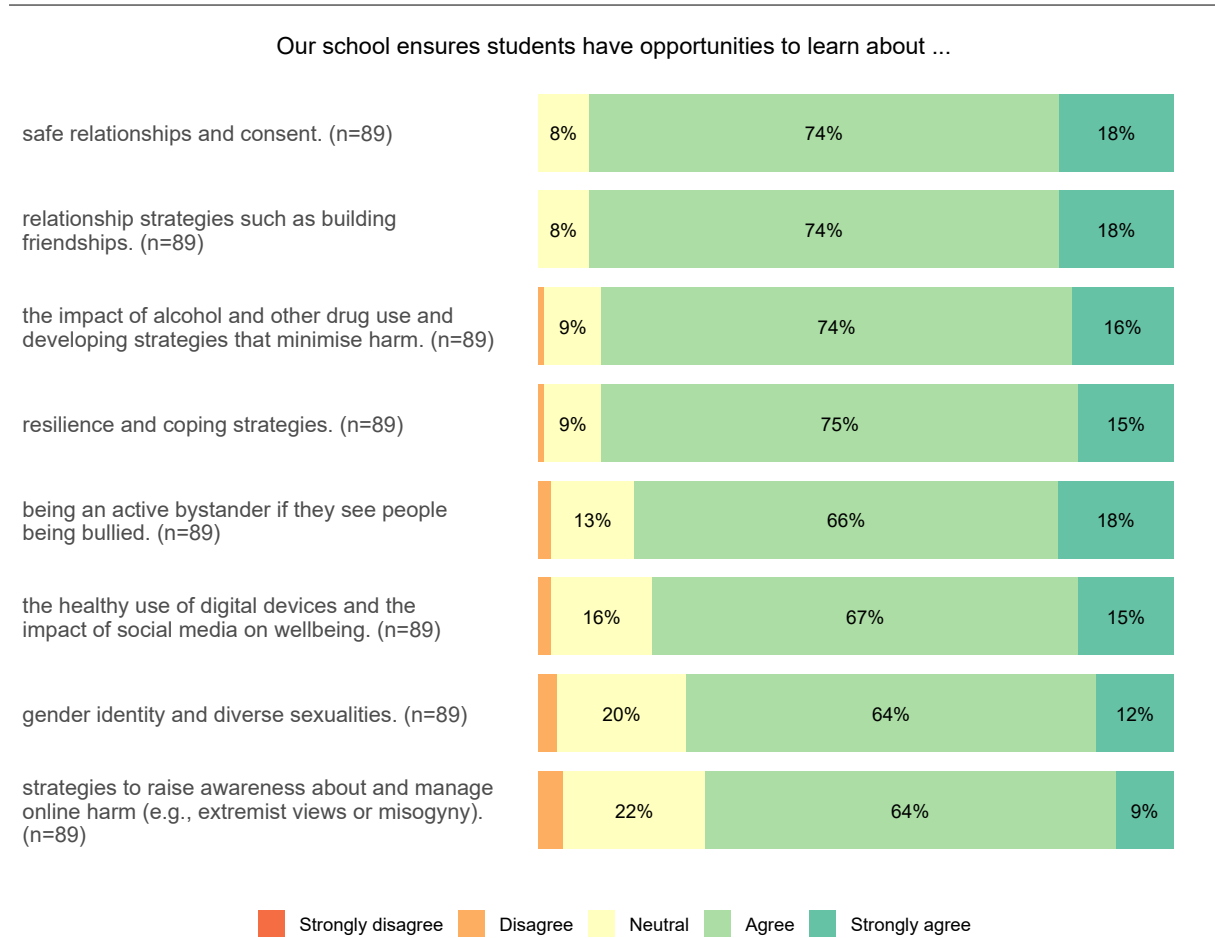


FIGURE 41 Principals' views on students' wellbeing learning opportunities

**Nearly all schools had well-embedded processes for addressing bullying behaviour, but ensuring teachers recognise and support a wider range of student wellbeing needs was more variable**

At a school-wide level, some wellbeing-related practices were more embedded than others. Figure 42 shows that nearly all (91%) principals agreed their school had well-embedded safe reporting and other systems that help identify and address bullying behaviour. In contrast, only around half (54%) agreed they had well-embedded processes for training teachers in trauma-informed practice. In addition, around one-fifth were neutral or disagreed that they had well-embedded processes for ensuring teachers know how to work with neurodivergent students or recognise and act on mental health warning signs. These findings suggest more school-wide focus on upskilling teachers on how to recognise and support a wider range of student wellbeing needs may be required at some schools.

Our school has well-embedded school-wide plans and/or processes related to ...

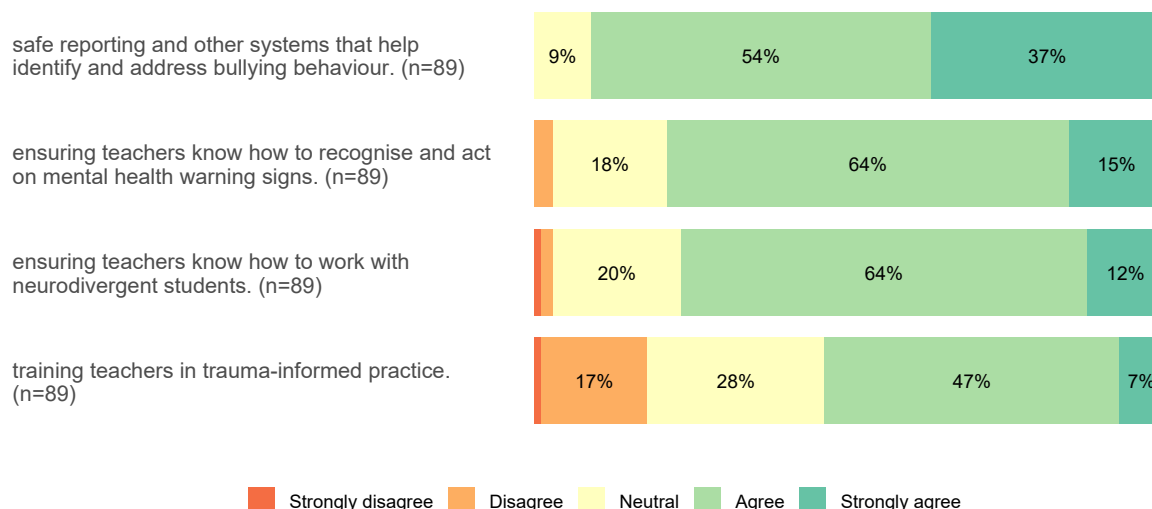


FIGURE 42 Principals’ views on school-wide plans and processes

## Principals’ working experiences and future plans

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, and reading*

Table 9 shows that, consistent with national survey findings across the last decade, principals continued to want more time for educational leadership (73%), as well as for reflection, reading, and innovation (76%).

Compared with previous cycles, there was an increase in the proportion of principals who would like the following changes to their work as a principal:

- reduce the demands of human resource management (from 30% in 2015, increasing each cycle to 60% in 2025)
- reduce external agencies’ demands/expectations (from 30% in 2015, increasing each cycle to 55% in 2025)
- higher salary (36% in 2022, increasing to 51% in 2025).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Note that secondary school principals, represented by the PPTA and SPANZ, ratified a 30-month collective agreement (2025–28) on 12 December 2025. This was in the middle of our data collection period, which was October–December 2025 and February 2026.

In 2025, we added “get consistent advice from the MoE, ERO, and the Teaching Council” to the list of potential changes. Just over half (53%) of principals selected this. We also included “have more professional dialogue about my work”, which had last been included in the 2015 survey. This has remained constant, selected by one-third of principals in both 2015 and 2025.

TABLE 9 Changes principals would like in their work, 2015–25

Change	2015 (n=182)	2018 (n=167)	2022 (n=44)	2025 (n=75)
More time to reflect/read/be innovative	73%	86%	73%	76%
More time to focus on educational leadership	81%	83%	80%	73%
Reduce demands of human resource management	30%	47%	48%	60%
More balanced life	67%	71%	59%	59%
Reduce external agencies' demands/expectations	30%	44%	48%	55%
Reduce administration/paperwork	54%	50%	30%	53%
Higher salary	34%	46%	36%	51%
Reduce demands of property management/development	31%	37%	*	40%

\* = not asked

Principals could also select “Other” to add to the list provided. The 10 responses highlighted principals' experiences of sector change, as well as relationships with government agencies:

To be part of the change model at the front end to assist in making the change workable and better implemented. To have our opinions valued, not just a select few.

Remove the government's ability to create politically driven change.

Currently about to walk away from a job and a school I love due directly to ERO and the MoE.

Over my time as principal the respect shown to the professional knowledge and experience of principals has decreased. The MoE in particular is condescending and disrespectful to principals often treating them like idiots and believing that work is nothing more than pānui and completion of forms.

One principal identified “more assistance in supporting students with home problems” as a change they would like to their work. Another focused on staffing:

If I employed someone to coach and manage the staff along with employing another person in school to deal with behaviour management then I think my time could have more of the above areas I've ticked. It always feels like there is a lack of personnel in school and all staff have clear job descriptions and they're really busy people. Solution: one more FTTE [full-time teacher equivalent] for each school.

## Preparation for principalship

In the 2025 survey, principals with less than 3 years' experience were asked about how well prepared they felt for their first principalship. Just under one-quarter of respondents who told us how long they had been a principal had been one for less than 3 years (24%, 19 principals).

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

Figure 43 shows that just under two-thirds of the 19 principals with less than 3 years' experience felt well prepared for their first principalship (53% well, 11% very well). We asked primary principals with less than 3 years' experience the same question in 2024 and the picture was very similar (Li et al., 2025).

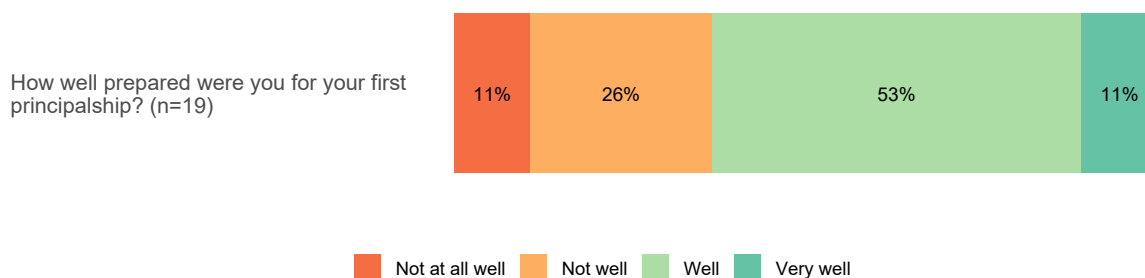


FIGURE 43 **New principals' preparation for first principalship (n=19)**

### **Plans for the next 5 years**

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

#### ***Principals' career plans have remained fairly stable over the past decade***

Table 10 presents data from a long-established question that asks principals to select their future career plans for the next 5 years from a provided list of options. As in previous national surveys, more than half expect to continue as principal of their current school. Overall, there is no change in the proportion who think they will lead another school or retire (approximately a fifth each). There is a slight decrease in the proportion of principals who see themselves changing to a different role within education (13%, compared with 24% in 2022).

The comments from respondents who selected "Other" highlighted uncertainty about staying a principal, due to its demands and impact on their wellbeing:

I will leave the role and attempt to return to teaching. I'd like to remain a principal, but the job is just not fun nor well paid enough. All risk no reward. I've watched the role get less and less about education and more and more about management of difficult parents.

I'm keeping options open, with an awareness that my current role is not sustainable. Maybe for 5 years?

I love principalship and witnessing students developing. However, it feels as though the landscape has changed. Perhaps it's time to find a different career/job which I can fall in love with/or simply do for a better life-work balance?

TABLE 10 Principals' career plans for the next 5 years, 2015–25

Plan	2015 (n=182)	2018 (n=167)	2022 (n=45)	2025 (n=75)
Continue as principal of current school	62%	62%	53%	57%
Apply for study award/sabbatical/ fellowship	32%	40%	20%	28%
Lead another school	23%	20%	20%	21%
Retire	19%	22%	18%	17%
Change to a different role within education	19%	21%	24%	13%
Change to a different role outside education	4% <sup>47</sup>	8% <sup>48</sup>	*	12%

\* = not asked

## Final comments from principals

Thirty-four principals took the opportunity to make a final comment at the end of the survey. These were a mix of positive, negative, and mixed reflections on being a principal. Some reiterated themes we have already reported—such as concerns about the politicisation of education, relationships with government agencies, and the current direction and pace of change:

Since I started as a principal, much of the fun has disappeared. The rate of change, the nature of change, and the lack of value of these changes is unsustainable.

Some principals made a comment about the wide scope of the role, and the challenges this brought.

It is a great job, very fulfilling, but too much is expected of us as leaders of learning when we get very little time to do this as we are busy with compliance, property, social issues, etc. We need better support and a better balance of life and work.

The role is often lonely and lacking in extrinsic thanks and recognition.

As an observation I have noticed that during my time as principal there has been a sharp increase [in] litigious behaviour displayed by parents (a very small number). Five years ago I did not need a budget for legal advice. There is very little specific and targeted support for principals in this space.

It is a fantastic job, but we are under-resourced and over worked.

We end this report with some of the positive comments principals made, highlighting the privilege it is to lead a school, and the rewards:

This is the hardest job, and the best job in the world!

It is a privilege to serve my Catholic community, but it is a very full and busy life.

It is rewarding. Accepting that there will always be work to do and that it is not possible to do everything that is asked of me has been helpful for my wellbeing.

<sup>47</sup> In 2015, this option was “retrain/change career”.

<sup>48</sup> In 2018, this option was “change career”.

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## 4. He matapaki | Discussion

This final section draws together the main findings from all survey domains to describe and discuss how the 2025 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 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

The Education and Training Act 2020 stated that one of the primary objectives for boards was to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi by:

- working to ensure their plans, policies, and local curriculum reflect local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and te ao Māori
- taking all reasonable steps to make instruction available in tikanga Māori and te reo Māori
- achieving equitable outcomes for Māori students.<sup>49</sup>

A few weeks into our survey implementation, in early November 2025, the Government announced a decision to remove this obligation for schools to give effect to the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>50</sup> In the announcement, Education Minister Erica Stanford said the Treaty was the Crown's responsibility, not schools'. A sizeable group of schools and sector bodies pushed back against this decision.

In this section of the discussion, we summarise what the national survey findings tell us about how effectively the system is honouring and enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The 2025 survey data showed a strong commitment among principals to honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Principals were confident in their own understanding of Te Tiriti and nearly all reported it was enacted in school values and practices. There appeared to be more variability in how consistently this understanding was shared across staff and governance.

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/legislation/education-and-training-act-2020/te-tiriti-o-waitangi>

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/577761/teachers-shocked-by-government-decision-to-remove-treaty-of-waitangi-requirement-in-schools>

School engagement with hapū and iwi was still not universal—just under 10% of principals reported no current interaction. Encouragingly, around one-third of principals expressed a desire to build their capabilities in this area through PLD, suggesting both a recognition of the importance of these relationships and a willingness to further strengthen them. Most principals reported engaging with hapū and iwi in ways that supported ākonga Māori (e.g., through co-curricular activities such as kapa haka, or by providing guidance) and built staff capability (e.g., for reo Māori, tikanga, histories, kapa haka). An increase in the proportion of principals reporting hapū and iwi representation on school boards may suggest a shift towards greater inclusion in governance.

Policy developments in the past 5 years, including the introduction of the ANZH curriculum and the requirements under section 127(1)(d) of the Education and Training Act 2020, may have played a role in deepening this engagement (Bolstad et al., 2025). With ANZH being re-worked and integrated into a new, broader social sciences curriculum, and if schools are no longer obligated to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, time will tell if progress in these areas continues, stalls, or regresses.

## Serving ākonga Māori

In response to research question 2, we summarise national survey findings about how effectively the education system is serving ākonga Māori. We acknowledge that this is based on perspectives from principals, as this study did not garner the perspectives of ākonga themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Our findings show widespread reporting of practices that affirm the identities of ākonga Māori such as access to co-curricular activities, clear goals for academic achievement and cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing, and access to positive Māori role models. Since the last survey in 2022, there has been an increase in principals reporting that te reo Māori and tikanga Māori are incorporated into daily school-wide practices—although a few selected “neutral”, no principals disagreed with this.

Overall, responses to an open question indicated that schools were taking a broad and often layered approach to improving outcomes for ākonga Māori, combining targeted academic support with efforts to embed te ao Māori across school culture, curriculum, and leadership. While many initiatives focused on strengthening identity, belonging, and staff capability, fewer principals identified system-level partnerships with hapū and iwi or deeply embedded strategic approaches, suggesting these may be areas for attention.

Nearly all principals reported active promotion of te reo Māori in their school. While most schools continued to report having a plan for students' Māori language learning, the picture has not changed since 2022. This suggests some schools lacked a structured or well-defined approach. A well-developed plan is crucial for sustaining and strengthening te reo Māori in schools (Hunia et al., 2018). Most principals reported providing or funding PLD for te reo Māori, although this has declined since 2022. The discontinuation of initiatives like Te Ahu o te Reo Māori may have contributed to this decline, by lessening access to PLD that builds confidence and fluency in both language and tikanga.

Te reo Māori is a “hard to staff” learning area across immersion levels, and access to bilingual and immersion pathways is limited in English-medium schools. Those that did offer this provision did not all have sufficient places for ākonga that applied, suggesting unmet demand for Māori-medium learning. Challenges in reo Māori provision, including finding kaiako and having enough places in bilingual classes, are likely to impact ākonga Māori. Addressing these shortfalls is critical to expanding reo Māori access for ākonga Māori in English-medium education.

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51 The MoE has developed and piloted a student voice survey. See <https://www.education.govt.nz/have-your-say/student-voice-survey/details>

## Serving Pacific students

Pacific students make up 13.5% of all Years 9–13 students in English-medium schools. 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. Just 10% of principals responding to the 2025 survey indicated that their school did not currently have students from Pacific cultures.

The 2020–2030 Action Plan for Pacific Education (Ministry of Education, 2024b) 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. The national survey findings contribute to the evidence base about progress towards these shifts, now and in the future:

1. Work reciprocally with diverse Pacific communities to respond to unmet needs, including growing and supporting Pacific bilingual and immersion education pathways.
2. Confront systemic racism and discrimination in education.
3. Enable every teacher, leader, and educational professional to take co-ordinated action to become culturally competent with diverse Pacific learners.
4. Partner with families to design education opportunities together with teachers, leaders, and educational professionals so aspirations for learning and employment can be met.
5. Grow, retain, and value highly competent teachers, leaders, and educational professionals with diverse Pacific whakapapa.

Most principals reported that their school interacted with their Pacific families and communities in at least one way. However, in one-fifth of schools with Pacific students, principals said they did not interact with Pacific families and community leaders at all. Consistent with how schools engaged with hapū and iwi, the most common interactions were in relation to cultural groups and seeking guidance around how best to support Pacific students. There are opportunities for greater involvement in school governance—less than one-third have Pacific representation on their board.

There is also potential for more schools to introduce approaches that affirm the identities of Pacific students. Around two-thirds of principals indicated at least one such practice happened in their school, but high selection of “neutral” indicated less confidence.

Although we did not ask principals to indicate how many Pacific students attended their school, principals from schools with few Pacific students often noted this in the open question about the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to achieve equitable outcomes for Pacific students. Responses from schools with few Pacific students fell into three groups: those not doing anything specific for Pacific students, with the rationale that they had small numbers; those that provided opportunities for Pacific students to share their culture through events such as cultural evenings; and those that built strong connections with Pacific families—with small numbers as an enabler of that.

Multiple responses to this same question referred to a Pacific dean, suggesting that schools saw particular value in having a Pacific person in this role focused on pastoral care, academic monitoring, and wellbeing of Pacific students. There is limited research on the dean role in general, and a particular gap in evidence with a Pacific lens and focus (Fraser, 2014; Murphy, 2011). However, referring to the Te Kotahitanga initiative, Fraser (2014, p. 91) concluded that “the purpose of pastoral care can closely align with key theories and findings in New Zealand literature that can improve the outcomes of Māori students and students from other minority groups”.

## Achieving equitable outcomes for all students

Multiple topics in the survey enable us to consider the extent to which the system is designed and supported to achieve equitable outcomes for all students. These include perspectives on the EQI funding system, student wellbeing, proposed changes to NCEA, use of streaming and fixed ability grouping, and access to digital technologies.

The 2022 national survey provided initial reactions to the EQI system and associated funding changes. Principals' views in 2025 reflected that they have had time to observe and reflect on what the EQI changes truly mean for their operational funding and decision making related to supporting students who face the greatest socioeconomic barriers to achievement. Overall, principals were less favourable about the EQI in 2025 than they were in 2022, with only 24% responding that it was reducing the stigma associated with socioeconomic status (down from 41% in 2022).

International and Aotearoa New Zealand data (Ministry for Social Development, 2026) show students are reporting high levels of mental health distress. Reflecting this, many principals wanted more mental health and wellbeing support for students and teachers. Over half of principals wanted, but could not readily access, external expertise to assist them to work with students with mental health needs or to support staff to work with students who have complex needs or trauma-related responses. Many identified that providing or accessing support for vulnerable students was an ongoing issue for their school. This concern appeared to peak during the COVID era and has now dropped to pre-COVID levels. This drop may also reflect a growth in the range of targeted services available to secondary schools such as the Awhi Mai Awhi Atu | Counselling in Schools initiative.

Nearly all principals reported their school offered students a range of wellbeing-related learning opportunities. Some areas had lower levels of coverage including healthy use of digital devices and online harm. Young people could benefit from these areas having more prominence in health programmes given the connection between social media use and mental health distress (Helliwell et al., 2026).

The findings showed some anti-discrimination practices were commonly embedded in school-wide plans or practice. However, principals in 2025 showed less agreement than in 2022 that two practices that foster inclusion were embedded—support for gender transitioning students and Rainbow (LGBTQIA+) students. Opportunities to learn about gender identity and diverse sexualities were also less common than other wellbeing learning opportunities. This can be considered within the context of polarised public discourse on young people and gender identity, and the role of schools. This played out in consultation on the draft RSE framework in 2025 (NZCER, 2025). However, fostering the inclusion and wellbeing of gender diverse students is an equity issue for schools as these students have poorer wellbeing outcomes than others (Guntupalli et al., 2023; MacKenzie et al., 2026).

Equity issues also came to the fore in principals' responses to questions about changes to NCEA and senior secondary qualifications. Concerns were raised around the proposed changes limiting learning opportunities and pathways for students and widening rather than reducing existing inequities. Most principals did not agree that the proposed changes to senior secondary qualifications would support better outcomes for students or reduce inequities in student outcomes.

Our findings show that inequities remained in students' access to digital technologies and connectivity at home, required to support learning beyond the school gates. This also has implications for schools' use of digital learning platforms, homework expectations, online assessment, and emerging uses of AI-enabled tools, all of which assume a level of access that is not available to all students and may not be available to students in the least advantaged contexts.

Finally, there has been a growing emphasis in Aotearoa New Zealand on the harmful impacts of streaming and fixed-ability grouping.<sup>52</sup> The Kōkirihiā<sup>53</sup> action plan (Tokona te Raki, 2022) outlines a plan for the removal of streaming by 2030. Questions in the national survey help to track progress towards this goal. Over two-thirds of principals reported their school did not use streaming or fixed-ability grouping, but there was no change from 2022.

### Supporting all people in the system

In response to research question 5, the 2025 national survey of secondary schools provides a lens on how the education system ensures that all individuals—whether students and their whānau, teachers, or school leaders—are provided with the support they need to succeed in an equitable and sustainable way, while also examining the impacts of key policy changes. The question of how the education system supports “all people” can be explored in terms of 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 2025, the Aotearoa New Zealand education system was going through the largest shift in education policy since 1989. The educational changes of significance to secondary principals in 2025 included (but were not limited to) the Education and Training (System Reform) Bill, transition to new Teaching Standards, attendance management plan requirements, disestablishment of Kāhui Ako, changes to learning support funding, changes to NCEA and senior secondary qualifications, changes to approved senior subjects, consultation on draft curriculum for Years 0–10, and downgrading a legal requirement for schools to give effect to the Treaty of Waitangi.

Within this context, principals reported variable experiences of advice and support from government agencies, including MoE attendance supports. We found an increase in the proportion of principals who wanted to reduce external agencies’ demands/expectations, and more than half of principals wanted to get consistent advice from agencies.

In a change from 2022, the leading issues facing schools in 2025 were “too much being asked of schools” and “keeping up with pace and volume of educational change”. Both issues were reported by more principals than in 2022. Most principals disagreed that curriculum changes were happening at an appropriate pace.

Policy changes related to school property were also at various stages of implementation during 2025. Only around half of principals indicated their buildings were in good condition and a similar proportion indicated their school has unmet property needs that are having a negative impact on teachers and students. There was a drop in the proportion who indicated their school had sufficient space for all their classes: from 60% of principals in 2022 to 46% in 2025. It remains to be seen whether the new Crown agency will improve this situation.

Extreme weather events also impact school property. More than half of schools, across nearly all regions, had experienced recent flooding and extreme winds in the last 5 years, and half had provided support to their community during and after climate-related events. While guidance for schools

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<sup>52</sup> See <https://www.kokirihiā.com/about-kokirihiā>

<sup>53</sup> Led by Tokona te Raki Māori Futures Collective, Kōkirihiā is a collaboration of 24 key education agencies. The design team included representation from: Mātauranga Iwi Leaders Group, rangatahi, high school principals, MoE, NZEI, CORE Education, universities, PPTA, PLD providers, NZQA, and ERO.

around extreme weather events is becoming more evident in school property risk-management processes, the extent to which ongoing climate impacts have been accounted for in property policy and planning is less clear. Despite policy signals about the need to reduce climate emissions across the education sector (Ministry of Education, 2024a), fewer than half of principals reported their school was taking action on climate and sustainability issues through, for example, strategic planning, curriculum, student leadership, and reducing emissions. Only one-third of principals said they had information about their school's carbon footprint. It is clear that schools need more systemic assistance to play their part in climate mitigation.

Despite the challenges outlined, more principals were positive about their job, morale, and levels of workload and stress, compared with 2022 data. The highest proportion of principals in a decade strongly agreed or agreed that their workload is manageable. However, this was not the situation for all principals in 2025. We reported an increase in the proportion of principals who have a workload that is so high they are unable to do justice to their school (up from one-fifth in 2022 to one-third in 2025). Over one-third of principals reported unmanageable workloads and levels of stress.

Consistent with national survey findings across the past decade, principals continued to want more time for educational leadership, as well as for reflection, reading, and innovation. Most principals were using AI to assist their own work, with their schools in various stages of policy development around its use by students and teachers across teaching and learning, assessment, and administration. PLD on AI in education was selected by over half of principals, topping the list of topics they would like future PLD on, and mirroring findings from primary principals in 2024. Secondary principals also wanted PLD on leading digital transformation (e.g., data use, AI tools, learning management systems). Advice and support from SPANZ and participating in a Professional Learning Group with other principals were rated highly as a source of advice and support for principals. These need to remain part of the ecosystem within which principals work.

## Looking ahead

The 2025 national survey has provided a snapshot of principals' perspectives amidst a period of significant shifts within the sector, with uncertainty about where some proposed changes will settle. The value of the longstanding NZCER national survey is its ability to monitor educational trends and policy impacts over time. The next national survey of secondary schools is likely to be 2028, when we can gain principals' perspectives on the impacts of changes that are being introduced now.

# He āpitahanga | Appendices

## Appendix A: Principal demographics and school characteristics

TABLE A1 Principals' gender (n=106)

Gender	n	Percent
Male	44	42%
Female	31	29%
Did not respond	31	29%

TABLE A2 Principals' ethnicity (n=106)

Ethnicity	n	Percent
NZ European/Pākehā	59	56%
Māori	11	10%
Samoan	4	4%
Prefer not to say	1	1%
Other (please describe)	7	7%
Did not respond	24	23%

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% as principals could select more than one response option.

TABLE A3 Profile of principal respondents' schools by EQI bands (n=106)

EQI Group	n	Percent
Fewer barriers	21	20%
More barriers	26	25%
Moderate barriers	59	56%

Note: Our principal responses are nationally representative of secondary schools by EQI group.

TABLE A4 Profile of principal respondents' schools by area (urban/rural) (n=106)

Urban/Rural	Count	Percent
Rural other	2	2%
Rural settlement	8	8%
Small urban area	30	28%
Medium urban area	13	12%
Large urban area	14	13%
Major urban area	39	37%

Note: Our principal responses are nationally representative of secondary schools by area (urban/rural).

TABLE A5 Profile of principal respondents' schools by region (n=106)

Region	n	Percent
West Coast Region	1	1%
Marlborough Region	2	2%
Tasman Region	2	2%
Bay of Plenty Region	4	4%
Hawke's Bay Region	4	4%
Taranaki Region	4	4%
Gisborne Region	5	5%
Northland Region	6	6%
Southland Region	6	6%
Manawatū-Whanganui Region	8	8%
Otago Region	8	8%
Waikato Region	9	8%
Wellington Region	13	12%
Canterbury Region	14	13%
Auckland Region	20	19%

Note: Our principal responses are broadly representative of secondary schools by region.

TABLE A6 Profile of principal respondents' schools by school type (n=106)

School type	n	Percent
Secondary (Years 11-15)	1	1%
Teen Parent Unit	1	1%
Composite	20	19%
Secondary (Years 7-15)	29	27%
Secondary (Years 9-15)	55	52%

Note: Our principal responses are broadly representative of secondary schools by school type.

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