

Secondary teachers' perspectives from the 2025 national survey

Uiuinga ā-Motu o ngā Kura

He whakarāpopototanga | Executive summary

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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 teacher survey. The findings from the principal survey are presented in a separate report (MacDonald et al., 2026).

Data collection took place from 27 October 2025 to 6 March 2026. All teachers from the 435 schools in the sampling frame were invited to complete the survey, and we received at least one teacher response from 131 schools. After data cleaning, 830 teacher responses from 126 schools were included in analysis, resulting in a 29% school response rate.

NZCER has run a National Survey of Secondary Schools regularly since 2003, with the last survey of secondary school teachers taking place in 2021. This enables us to monitor trends over time. This report presents the findings in each of the six survey domains alongside a section on teachers' working experiences and future plans.

Key findings

Teaching and learning

- Less than half of teachers indicated having sufficient support to teach students with additional learning needs such as students with disabilities, students with learning difficulties, students with physical or mental health or behaviour issues, and neurodivergent students. Most teachers taught students learning English as an additional language but less than half indicated they have skills and knowledge to do so or have sufficient support.
- Building on prior knowledge, managing cognitive load, and responding to individual learners are central to how teachers approach teaching in classes where they feel most effective. Opportunities for open-ended, dialogic, and community-connected learning are less frequent, but used at least occasionally by most teachers. Two-thirds of teachers were feeling under time pressure to get through content either frequently (33%) or always/nearly always (33%).
- Compared with 2018 and 2021, more teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they incorporated tikanga Māori and te reo Māori into their teaching. Kaiako Māori were more likely to use te reo Māori in their classrooms at higher proficiency levels.
- Two-thirds of teachers said they were currently integrating generative artificial intelligence (AI) into their teaching practices. The most common use was to develop learning materials. Teachers who don't use AI in their teaching practice were concerned about quality, bias, and ethical impacts.
- Just under half of teachers said climate change was a focus in some of their teaching. In these teachers' classes, students often learnt about climate impacts and solutions, but were less likely to be undertaking climate action.

Curriculum and assessment

- A majority of teachers thought NCEA should be "improved rather than removed". There were mixed views on whether the proposed new qualifications were going in the right direction, with questions about the rationale for the change.
- Teachers had mixed views about the direction of curriculum change, but clear concerns about pace and engagement with the teaching profession.

Inclusion

- Most teachers thought Te Tiriti o Waitangi was widely enacted in school values and day-to-day activities.
- Teachers reported high use of inclusive and culturally responsive practices such as group learning, peer support strategies, and knowing which cultures their students identify with. There were lower levels of agreement for practices connecting with Pacific learners.

Wellbeing

Teacher wellbeing

- Teachers' views on job satisfaction, morale, and workload have remained largely consistent over time. Most teachers enjoy their job. Morale has improved to 2018 levels, after a decline in 2021, which may have been associated with additional demands and uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Around a third of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that their workload is manageable (31%), that their level of stress is manageable (35%), and agreed or strongly agreed that their workload is so high they cannot do justice to their students (34%).
- There is a small proportion of teachers (14%) who do not report that their school cares about the wellbeing of its staff, but this has declined from 24% in 2021.
- Nearly all teachers (91%) perceived they have sufficient autonomy in teaching but only half agreed they have opportunities to participate in school decisions.

Student wellbeing

- More teachers (86%) agreed or strongly agreed that student wellbeing is a strong focus in their school compared with 2021 (72%).
- Students still have unmet support needs. Only 60% of teachers indicated that vulnerable students can get timely external support.
- Three-quarters of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that their school had an effective school-wide approach for encouraging positive behaviours. However, somewhat fewer (60%) agreed or strongly agreed that their school had an effective school-wide approach for managing student behaviour across the school. Most teachers felt safe, but disruptive behaviour has increased since 2015.

Support and resourcing

- Around three-quarters of teachers get the support they need from their school to do their job effectively.
- More teachers than in 2021 and 2018 have had training to recognise mental health warning signs in students.
- Teachers had mixed views on the usefulness of PLD they have had in the past 3 years. Around two-thirds of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they had had useful subject specialist PLD from teacher networks or subject associations (66%) and useful school-wide PLD (62%, up from 30% in 2021).
- Teachers have diverse future PLD needs, but PLD about AI is wanted by the highest proportion of teachers.
- Most early career teachers felt well supported (79%) and guided into effective practices (78%). Most mentors felt valued by school leaders but still face challenges in getting time allocated or useful professional learning.

Collaborative relationships

- Most teachers (70%) agreed or strongly agreed they had opportunities to see and discuss the work of other teachers in their department or subject area, but fewer (48%) had these opportunities across subject areas.

Teachers' working experience and future plans

- Interest in being principal has remained stable at around 10% of teachers. These teachers are most attracted to being able to set the direction of a school. Teachers who are not interested in becoming a principal are put off by being diverted from teaching, and the workload.

- Teachers' career plans have remained stable over the past decade, with 40% intending to continue in their role, and 32% wanting to build their leadership skills.
- The most-selected changes that teachers would like to their work were a reduction in the scale and pace of change (71%) and more support staff/teacher aides (62%). Since 2015, the proportion of teachers wanting more support staff has increased each survey cycle.

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.

Most teachers thought **Te Tiriti o Waitangi** was widely enacted in school values and day-to-day activities, though there was more variability in views on whether a school had a shared understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. These findings align with principals' perspectives (MacDonald et al., 2026). Māori words or phrases, such as greetings and farewells, are used in most secondary classrooms—12% of teachers said they avoided using te reo Māori due to lack of confidence. Kaiako Māori and teachers in schools with more socioeconomic barriers were more likely to use te reo Māori in their classrooms at higher proficiency levels, and kaiako Māori at all proficiency levels were also more likely than non-Māori teachers to report using te reo Māori in a wider range of ways. This highlights differences in confidence and capability and points to the importance of ongoing support to build wider teacher capability in te reo Māori across the workforce.

While many teachers and schools are working actively to support **ākonga Māori**, some ākonga may face environments where culturally responsive practices are less visible or embedded. Future efforts should continue to focus on PLD related to te ao Māori, and ensuring all schools can consistently provide culturally sustaining and affirming learning experiences for ākonga Māori.

There is room for improvement in the system to ensure that all **Pacific students** are known by their teachers and have culturally sustaining and affirming learning experiences. Only around one-third of teachers reported receiving practical help from PLD for teaching Pacific students or building connections with Pacific students and their families.

In addressing the broader goal of **achieving equitable outcomes for all students**, the survey shows equity is not yet fully realised for students with additional learning and wellbeing needs. Data from this 2025 national survey and the 2025 Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey (Ministry of Social Development, 2026) both indicate there are still substantial numbers of vulnerable students who are not accessing professional and/or external mental health support. More secondary teachers are seeking support to teach students with learning support needs, including additional teacher aides. Unequal access to generative AI tools is an emerging issue.

Finally, regarding **support for all people in the system**, the majority of teachers reported a collaborative, mutually supporting school culture, the school caring about the wellbeing of its staff, and having opportunities to participate in school decision making. However, this is not the experience for all teachers, and there is room for improvement. There is a clear need for ongoing efforts to support teachers, particularly in this period of significant change in the sector. Teachers need school-level, and sometimes external, support to respond to students with additional learning and wellbeing needs. Strengthening approaches to promoting positive behaviour and managing behaviour is an ongoing need. The system also needs flexibility to meet the PLD needs of individual teachers, schools, and the wider system.

The 2025 national survey has provided a snapshot of teachers' perspectives amidst a period of significant shifts within the sector. 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 teachers' perspectives on the impacts of changes that are being introduced now.

References

- MacDonald, J., Bolstad, R., Dong, J., Boyd, S., Rowe-Williams, J., Coblentz, D., Hunt, D., Alansari, M., Gibbs, B., & Priestley, H. (2026). *Secondary principals' perspectives from the 2025 national survey Uiuīnga ā-Motu o ngā Kura*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.18296/rep.0098>
- Ministry for Social Development. (2026). *Youth health + wellbeing survey 2025 findings*. <https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/publications-resources/consultations/youth-health-andwellbeing-survey-results/index.html>

Full report: MacDonald et al. (2026). *Secondary teachers' perspectives from the 2025 national survey—Uiuīnga ā-Motu o ngā Kura*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.18296/rep.0102>