



NEW ZEALAND COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

TE RŪNANGA O AOTEAROA MŌ TE RANGAHAU I TE MĀTAURANGA

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Snapshot of New Zealand primary schools

A new survey shows primary schools are largely positive places, with many reporting gains in student performance.

The New Zealand Council for Educational Research has released a snapshot report which draws on data from its national survey of the country's primary schools, conducted in June this year. More in-depth reports from the data will be published in 2008.

Chief researcher Cathy Wylie says both principals and teachers reported a rise in student performance, which they tended to attribute to an increase in teachers' knowledge and confidence, school-wide professional development and better use of assessment data.

However Dr Wylie says funding, heavy workloads and staffing issues remain persistent concerns for schools.

For example, while more than 90 percent of teachers said they enjoyed their job, less than half thought their workload was fair or manageable and only 32 percent said they had work/life balance.

Principals also reported enjoying their job but 42 percent rated their typical stress level as high or very high. Their average working week was 59 hours.

Of the principals who reported gains in student performance, 58 percent said the gains would be hard to sustain because of the high level of staff commitment involved, the loss of key staff or sometimes because additional funding from contestable pools was coming to an end.

"It's clear from this survey and other research that our self-managing schools need continual support if they are to build on the gains they have made," Dr Wylie says. "We have to take some new approaches in what we ask of schools."

Other findings included:

- 13 percent of teachers expressed interest in being a principal in the future, with another 15 percent unsure. That's about the same as when we last asked in 2003.

- All but 8 percent of parents said their child was in the school of their first choice. A third were bypassing their local school in order to get to this school.
- When they added up school donations, activity fees, trips, uniforms, fundraising, stationery and transport, parents were spending an average \$489 a year on their primary school child's education.
- 38 percent of trustees supported the government setting minimum standards of achievement that schools must report to parents. That compares to 10 percent of principals in favour and 13 percent of teachers. Trustees are equally concerned as principals and teachers about the nature of such standards, how they would be measured, and how the information would be used.
- A fifth of board of trustee members thought their responsibilities were too high – fewer than in 2003 and much lower than their secondary counterparts in our 2006 survey. They spent an average 3.4 hours on board work a week.
- Many trustees indicated they would like more advice and support from the Ministry of Education than they are currently getting.

The survey involves principals, teachers and trustees at 351 schools, and parents at a further 36 schools. Response rates were 56 percent for principals, 48 percent for teachers, and 47 percent for trustees and principals. The responses were generally representative of national school characteristics.

To read the 9-page snapshot report go to: <http://www.nzcer.org.nz/pdfs/15870.pdf>

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