

Key findings

This report provides a snapshot of information from the 2016 NZCER national survey regarding the role and impact of digital technologies for learning in New Zealand primary and intermediate schools. We asked teachers and principals how students were using digital technology in the classroom, and how this was benefiting their learning. We asked teachers and principals about their school's digital infrastructure, and the degree of support they had to help them make good use of this for teaching and learning. We inquired about the role of digital technology in supporting teachers' own professional learning and networking. We asked parents and whānau about the importance they placed on their children having opportunities for learning with digital technology.

Some key findings are summarised here in a series of themed infographics, along with a brief discussion of where to find further details and analysis in each chapter of the report. The survey results raise further questions which may be valuable points of discussion for school leaders, teachers, policy makers, boards of trustees, and parents/whānau in making ongoing decisions about the integration of digital technologies for learning in schools around New Zealand. Some suggested discussion questions are presented in the final chapter of this report.

How are students using digital technologies for learning?

One way to understand the evolving role of digital technologies in New Zealand schools is to investigate how students currently use digital technologies in the classroom to learn, create, and share their work, and communicate, connect, and collaborate with people within and beyond their schools, and how this is changing over time.

Teachers' reports suggest that students' use of digital technologies often centre on a few key kinds of activities, such as practising skills, searching for information, and producing work such as documents or slideshows. Other digitally-based learning opportunities are still relatively uncommon in primary classrooms (such as students learning to code or programme), or are quite variable between classrooms (for example, use of games and simulations, or creation of multimedia work).

One interesting finding was that many teachers say they would like their students to be using digital technologies to collaborate and communicate with people beyond the school on shared learning projects. The reasons why this does not already happen are unclear, but may include time pressures, a lack of opportunity to connect with people in other schools or the wider community around authentic learning projects, or teachers and students not knowing how or where to start in order to make this a reality.

For more on how students were using digital technologies for learning, see Chapter 2.

Is digital technology good for students' learning?

Teachers generally seemed to hold positive views about the benefits and impacts of learning with digital technologies. Most teachers agreed that digital technologies provide a range of benefits to learners, although some expressed concerns around equity of access, safety issues, or the impact on teachers' working hours. Even with these concerns it is notable that few teachers agreed that learning with digital technologies is too time-consuming for the benefits gained.

For more on teachers' and principals' views about the benefits of digital technologies for learning, see Chapter 3.

Including digital technologies in the curriculum

The 2016 national survey was undertaken not long after an announcement by the Minister of Education that digital technology will be more formally integrated into *The New Zealand Curriculum* and *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* by 2018. We invited teachers and principals to comment on the inclusion of digital technology as a strand in the technology learning area. Forty-two percent of principals and 30% of teachers wrote a comment.

These comments suggest generally positive views about the inclusion and strengthening of digital technologies in the curriculum, saying that digital technology was "necessary" and "essential" learning for young people today.

Some teachers and principals raised a number of other issues and questions about how this will play out in practice. These include questions around equity of access, funding issues, overcrowding the curriculum, and professional learning and support for teachers. Some principals said they already faced challenges in keeping up with escalating costs for digital technology.

For more details, see Chapter 4.

Infrastructure and support for teaching with digital technologies

We asked teachers and principals a range of questions about the infrastructure, support, and capabilities within their schools to use digital technologies for teaching, learning, and professional work. The teacher surveys also included an open question, inviting teachers to comment on any additional support they thought they needed to integrate digital technology for learning into the curriculum.

While internet connectivity appeared to be good in most schools, some teachers and principals identified challenges accessing hardware or software that is suitable to their needs, at the times at which they or their students need it. The costs associated with keeping technologies up to date were a major concern for more than half of principals. Some principals and teachers raised questions about equity of access for schools or communities who cannot afford these costs.

For further details, see Chapter 5.

Teachers' use of digital technologies to support their own work and professional learning

Most New Zealand primary and intermediate teachers were using digital technologies to find resources and teaching materials, and to collaborate with colleagues within their schools. Teachers were less likely to go online to discuss teaching and learning or to seek out online professional learning, though a small percentage of teachers did this often. If teachers had an online professional learning network, this most often involved connecting with between one and 20 other people on a regular basis, and more than a third indicated they have no online professional learning network (PLN).

The most useful online resources for supporting their teaching, according to teachers, were Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI), overseas resource sites, and subject-specific online networks. Aside from TKI, reasonably large proportions of teachers said they did not know or had not used various online resources we asked about.

For further details, see Chapter 6.

Parent and whānau views about learning with digital technology

Most of the parents and whānau who responded to the national survey indicated that it is important for their children to have opportunities for learning with digital technology at school, though this is not the most important factor in choosing a school. Parents and whānau saw digital technologies as being ubiquitous and “part of the future”, but also valued their children having a balance of other learning activities and opportunities. Some parents and whānau had online access to information about their child's school learning. This was more likely to be information about school events and trips than about what's happening in the child's classroom or work children have done that they want to share. Few parents indicated that they can access online information about their child's achievement or attendance.

For further details, see Chapter 7.