

The research

The *Me and My School* survey encompasses three aspects of student engagement common to the research literature. The first is behaviour, and the students' actual participation in school and learning. This includes positive conduct, persistence, and involvement in school life.

The second aspect is students' emotional responses to teachers, peers, learning, and school. The third is cognitive: the psychological investment students have in their own learning. This includes their willingness to take on learning challenges and self-regulate their learning.

All three aspects are associated with the key competencies in the new curriculum, which put considerable emphasis on students having the disposition to learn, to participate, and to relate to others, as well as the inclination to manage themselves and their learning.

Me and My School explores these three aspects of engagement, with a particular focus on the emotional and cognitive aspects, through a series of 36 questions. In 2009 we added six questions about reading habits and four general questions about students' routines. These are included to provide context to the engagement data. Why have an engagement survey? Research tells us that students who are engaged with their learning and who feel positive about school are more likely to have positive educational and health outcomes. Low levels of engagement have been associated with lower achievement levels, dropping out, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. The longitudinal Competent Children/Competent Learners study run by NZCER considered the association between student engagement and a number of educational and social outcomes for students at age 16, and found statistically significant relationships.

Unlike some educational variables, engagement can be influenced by the ways we teach and the ways we organise our schools. That's why we felt it could be useful for schools to have a standardised instrument to look at engagement and to enable them to track it over time.

How we developed *Me and My School*

Years 7-10 are pivotal for students, marked by school transitions, emotional and physical changes and increased rates of suspensions and stand downs. We wanted to come up with a student survey for those years that could provide reliable measures referenced to national norms. For most questions, we have used Likert-type items which invite responses on a four-point scale from strongly disagree, disagree, agree to strongly agree. The items were sourced from national and international research literature including NZCER's Competent Children/Competent Learners project, or were specially constructed by researchers to address the three different aspects of engagement. Each item was carefully reviewed by researchers outside the development team to ensure their validity.

Testing and trials

We carried out two major pilot trials, the first involving a bank of 64 questions and the second the 36 best performing items from this bank. In 2007 we ran a national trial of the final instrument, involving about 8500 students. That data has established the national norms for Years 7 to 10.