

---

## 8.

# Principals' perspectives on external review, advice, and expertise

In this section we start with principals' views of their schools' experiences of the Education Review Office (ERO), the government agency responsible for external evaluation of individual schools and providing advice through their reviews and national overviews of the quality of provision in schools. Then we turn to principals' perceptions of their interactions with government agencies and national bodies, and their access to external expertise.

### Experiences of ERO

We asked principals three questions about recent ERO reviews: When was the school last reviewed by ERO? What was the return time given after the *most recent* ERO review? What was the return time given after the *previous* ERO review?

As context, Table 29 shows when the school was last reviewed by ERO. For 71% of principals this was within the last 2–3 years at the time of completing the survey (2016, 2017, and 2018).

TABLE 29 Last ERO review, reported by principals

Year	Principals ( <i>n</i> = 167) %
2018	16
2017	28
2016	28
2015	20
2014	8
2013	1

Principals who responded to our survey were slightly less likely to lead a school on a 1–2-year return time than schools nationally. Four percent of the principals said their school had been given a 1–2-year return time at their most recent ERO review, 65% said their school had been given a 3-year return time, and 29% said their school had been given a 4–5-year return time.<sup>48</sup> School decile was associated with whether schools are currently on a 4–5-year review return, increasing from 5% of decile 1–2 secondary schools to 67% of decile 9–10 schools. A notable change from 2015 is that most decile 1–2 schools are now on a 3-year return (90%). In 2015, 30% of decile 1–2 schools were on a 1–2-year review return.

### **There is movement across adjacent ERO return time status**

No principals who responded to the survey led schools that had moved from a 1–2-year return to a 4–5-year return, or in the other direction from a 4–5-year return to a 1–2-year return. However, there was movement between adjacent return times.

Moving to a *more* frequent ERO review:

- 43% of those currently on a 1–2-year return had previously been on a 3-year return<sup>49</sup>
- 6% of those currently on a 3-year return had previously been on a 4–5-year return.

Moving to a *less* frequent ERO review:

- 14% of those currently on a 3-year return had previously been on a 1–2-year return
- 54% of those currently on a 4–5-year return had previously been on a 3-year return.

### **Most principals are positive about their interactions with ERO**

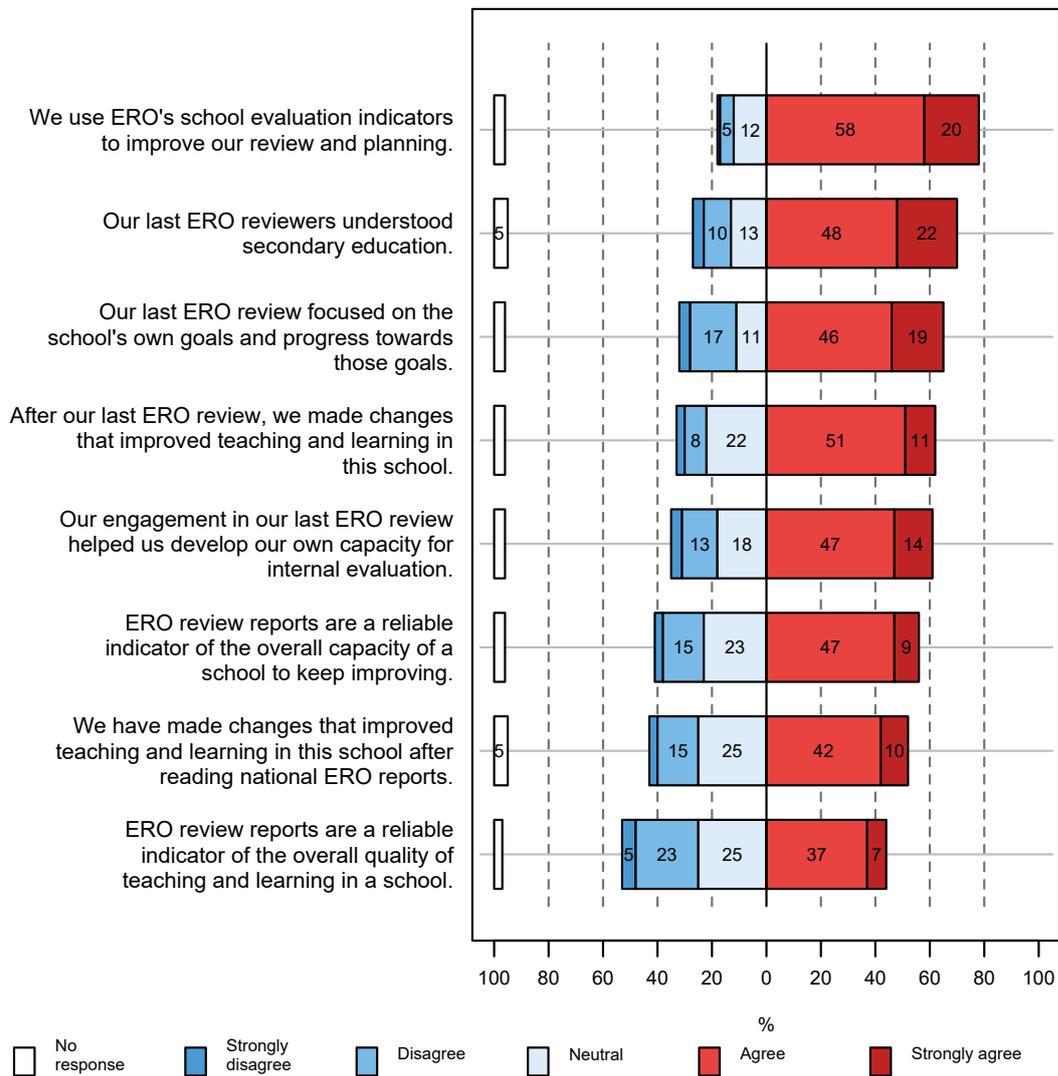
Most secondary principals are positive about their interactions with ERO and ERO reviews (see Figure 40). Many had used their last ERO review report to improve their own review and planning, and to make changes that improved teaching and learning in the school. Just over half the principals said their school made changes as a result of ERO's national reports on secondary schooling. As in 2015, there is less agreement from principals about the reliability of ERO review reports as an indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in a school (44% of principals agree or strongly agree).

---

<sup>48</sup> This is close to ERO national figures as at late December 2016: 9% of secondary schools were in the 1–2-year review return category, 63% of secondary schools were in the 3-year review return category, and 26% of secondary schools were in the 4–5-year review return category. (Data from ERO's Annual Report 2017/18, available at: <https://www.ero.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/ERO-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>)

<sup>49</sup> Note that there are small numbers here, with only seven principals responding to the survey leading schools on a 1–2-year return.

FIGURE 40 Principals' views of ERO and use of ERO reviews and reports (n = 167)



Principals in schools on a 4–5-year return time are more likely to agree with three of the statements in Figure 40:

- ERO review reports are a reliable indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in a school (63% of principals leading a school on a 4–5-year return agree, compared with 37% of principals in a school on a 3-year return, and 29% of principals in a school on a 1–2-year return).
- ERO review reports are a reliable indicator of the overall capacity of a school to keep improving (75% of principals leading a school on a 4–5-year return agree, compared with 51% of principals in a school on a 3-year return, and 29% of principals in a school on a 1–2-year return).
- We use ERO’s school evaluation indicators to improve our review and planning (79% of principals leading a school on a 4–5-year return and 78% of principals in a school on a 3-year return agree, compared with 57% of principals in a school on a 1–2-year return).

### Views of external advice

Secondary schools use a range of advice and support as they navigate their way through legal and moral responsibilities, including the core curriculum and assessment, finances and property, and student wellbeing and welfare. We asked principals how helpful they had found the advice they received from some government agencies and national bodies (see Figure 41).

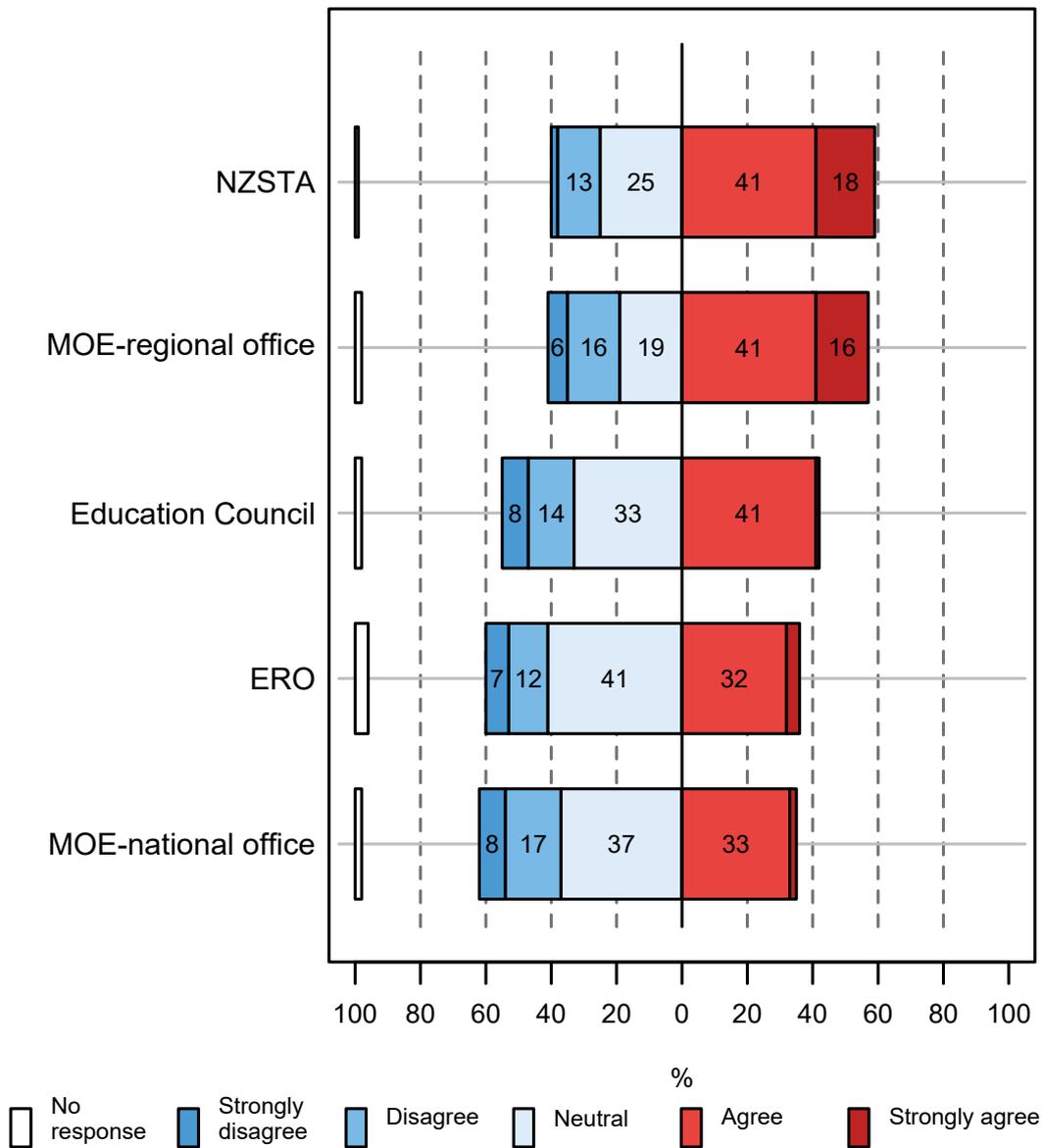
#### **Over half of principals got helpful advice from NZSTA and Ministry regional offices**

Overall, principals are less positive in 2018 about having had helpful advice than they were in 2015.<sup>50</sup> Many are neutral, which may suggest that they did not have a reason to seek advice from a particular agency, or that their experience was mixed. The only agencies that more than half of principals agree had given helpful advice are the Ministry's regional office (57% of the principals, but down from 73% in 2015) and NZSTA (59% of the principals, also down from 73% in 2015). Forty-three percent of the principals agree they received helpful advice from the Education Council, up from 33% in 2015 when it was the Teachers Council/ EDUCANZ. Just over a third of the principals agree they had helpful advice from ERO and the Ministry's national office.

---

<sup>50</sup> Note that the scale changed slightly with no option for "not sure" in 2018. As the proportion of principals selecting "not sure" in 2015 ranged from 0.5% to 2.2% we do not think this was a factor in the decline in the proportion of principals agreeing.

FIGURE 41 Principals' level of agreement that they received helpful advice from government agencies (n = 167)



## Access to external expertise

### Over half of the principals cannot access support for working with students with mental health issues

Most secondary principals thought they could access external expertise needed by their school across the wide range of areas we asked about, from improving student behaviour to analysis of student achievement data to learning with digital technologies. However, there were notable areas where a sizeable group cannot access support, or where a higher proportion cannot access this support in 2018 compared with 2015:

- working with students with mental health issues (62%, up from 36% in 2015; in 2012, 51% could not access this support)

- engaging parents, whānau, and Pacific fanau (34%, a new question for 2018)
- reliable strategies for Māori student learning (35%, up from 20% in 2015) and Pasifika student learning (28%). Principals in deciles 5–8 are more likely to say they need but cannot access this support
- improving student wellbeing (27%, up from 8% in 2015)
- differentiating teaching for students with learning support needs (27%).

There was one notable improvement in school access to external expertise since 2015: making the best choices on a tight budget (14% could not access this expertise in 2018, down from 28% in 2015).

### Summary and discussion

Most principals are positive about their interactions with ERO. Many make use of ERO review reports and indicators to make improvements in their school. Principals in schools on a 4–5-year return time are more likely to agree that ERO review reports are a reliable indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in a school or the capacity of a school to keep improving.

Overall, principals are less positive in 2018 about having had helpful advice from government agencies and national bodies than they were in 2015. There were no decile-related differences in principal views of the helpfulness of the advice they got from government agencies and support bodies, or in their use of ERO reports or their views of interactions with ERO.

There are also notable areas where some principals report they cannot access the external expertise they need. Of particular note is the increase to 62% of principals who need, but cannot access, support for working with students with mental health issues.

Sizeable minorities of principals also report needing more support for engaging parents and whānau, implementing strategies to improve Māori and Pasifika student learning, and differentiating teaching for students with learning support needs. These areas continue to present problems for substantial minorities of secondary schools, indicating needs that cannot be met by asking schools to source their own advice.