
7. Curriculum, assessment, and reporting to parents and whānau

An important national development for the future of the learning opportunities that primary schools can provide occurred in 2019. The Curriculum, Progress, and Achievement Ministerial Working Group grappled with the issues that have become evident since *The New Zealand Curriculum (NZC)* became mandatory in 2010, and the issues around valid and reliable assessment of student progress that came to the fore with National Standards. Its recommendations would provide schools and kura with much more clarity, guidance, and support, while ensuring that there is ongoing evaluation and review to support progress.²³

Material we report here gives pertinent information for future evaluation of how things change for students, teachers, parents and whānau, and for schools.

In this section, we first look at teacher reports of their provision of some key learning opportunities, and their students' involvement in their own assessment. Next we look at how teachers use assessment information, and what parents and whānau make of the student progress information they get from schools. Then we look at principals' perspectives on the use of student assessment information across their school. We conclude this chapter with principals' reports of some of their school's NZC-linked professional development, and their experience of Ministry-funded guidance for schools in relation to local curriculum framing.

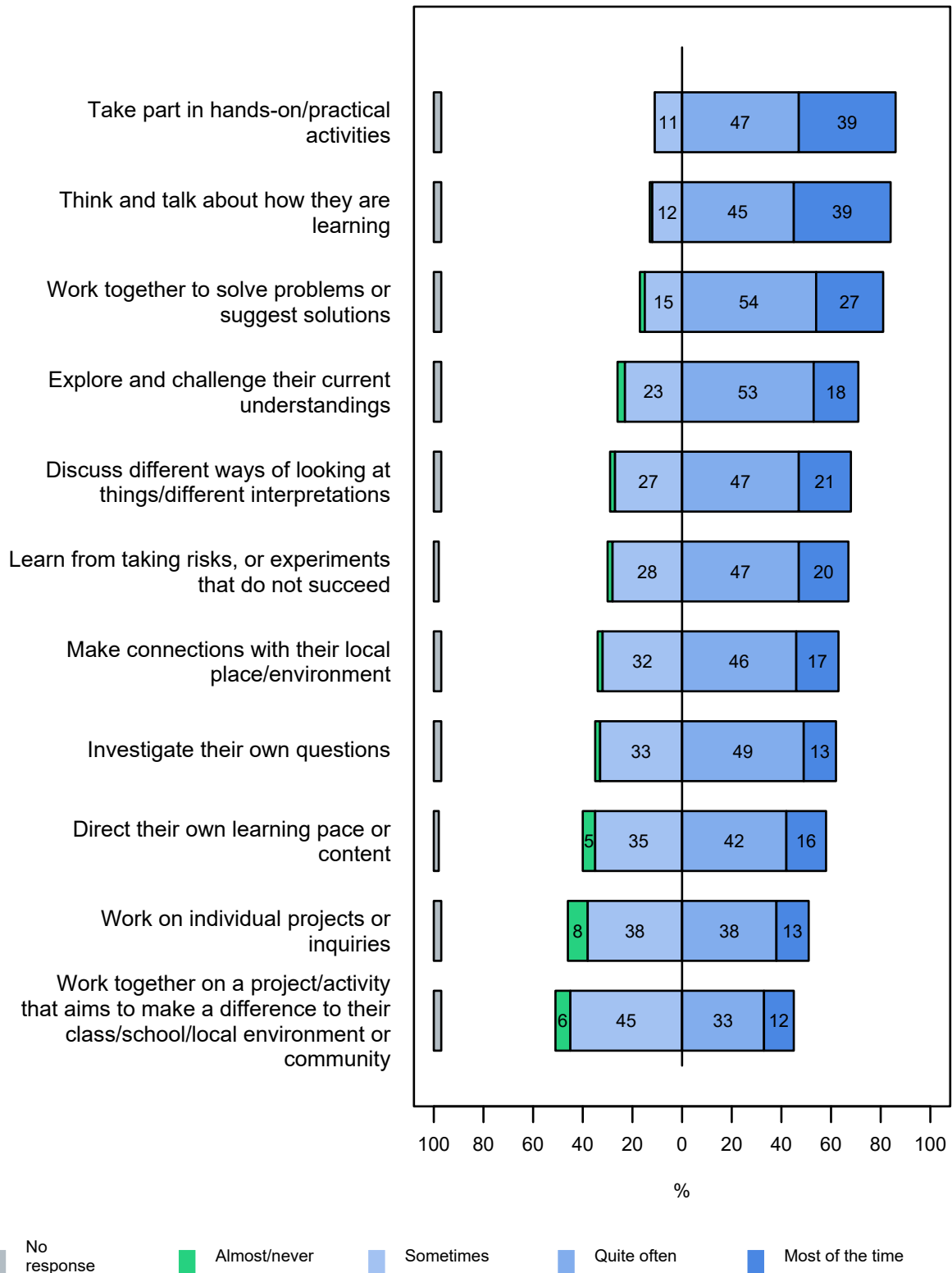
Learning to learn opportunities are common but not frequent

The 11 learning experiences reported here are ones that are beneficial for student motivation and metacognition, growing knowledge as well as skills. Motivation, metacognition, and knowledge are all vital for ongoing agility in learning—even more essential now as our learners navigate and construct a post COVID-19 world.

Figure 27 shows that these opportunities happened at least sometimes in almost all the teachers' classes. It was most common for teachers to provide students with opportunities to take part in hands-on/practical activities, and to talk and think about how they were learning. It was least common for students to work on individual projects or inquiries, or to work together on a project or activity aimed to make a difference.

²³ Curriculum, Progress and Achievement Ministerial Advisory Group. (2019). *Strengthening curriculum, progress, and achievement in a system that learns. E whakakaha ana i te marautanga, te koke, me te ekenga taumata i te rangapū e ako ana.* https://conversation-space.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ELS+0324+CPA+Final+MAG+report_06+includes+Ed+Strategy+vision.pdf

FIGURE 27 Key learning to learn opportunities (Teachers, n = 620)



We have included this bank of questions in the national survey since 2013. The picture shown in Figure 27 has remained largely consistent over time, underlining the need for teachers to have more guidance and support in relation to our national curriculum. This need is evident in the 2019 recommendations by the Curriculum, Progress, and Achievement Ministerial Advisory Group, and in the Tomorrow's Schools Independent Review Taskforce's recommendation for a strong Curriculum Centre within the Ministry of Education.

Just a few learning to learn opportunities had increased in frequency in 2019:

- take part in hands-on/practical activities (most of the time for 39% of teachers in 2019, compared with 20% in 2016, and 24% in 2013)
- direct their own learning pace or content (most of the time for 16% of teachers in 2019, compared with 12% in 2016, and 10% in 2013)
- work together on a project/activity that aims to make a difference to their class/school/local environment or community (most of the time for 12% of teachers in 2019, compared with 6% in 2016, and 6% in 2013; the increase may reflect the inclusion of 'environment' in this item in 2019).

Most parents and whānau think their child's school helps them develop skills that support learning

We asked parents and whānau how well they thought their child's school helped them with skills and attitudes that support making the most of life, and learning. The full set of items is reported in Section 9 of this report. Particularly relevant here is that close to 90% of the parents and whānau thought their child's school helped their child develop these things 'well' or 'very well':

- Keep at it when learning is difficult
- Ask good questions/be reflective
- Develop problem-solving skills and attitudes.

Involving students in their own assessment is common. We continued the focus on metacognition in a set of items for teachers about how students are supported in classes to improve the quality of their work through understanding what is expected of them, and learning how to monitor and judge their own and others' work. We also asked teachers how they use assessments to inform their work and support student progress.

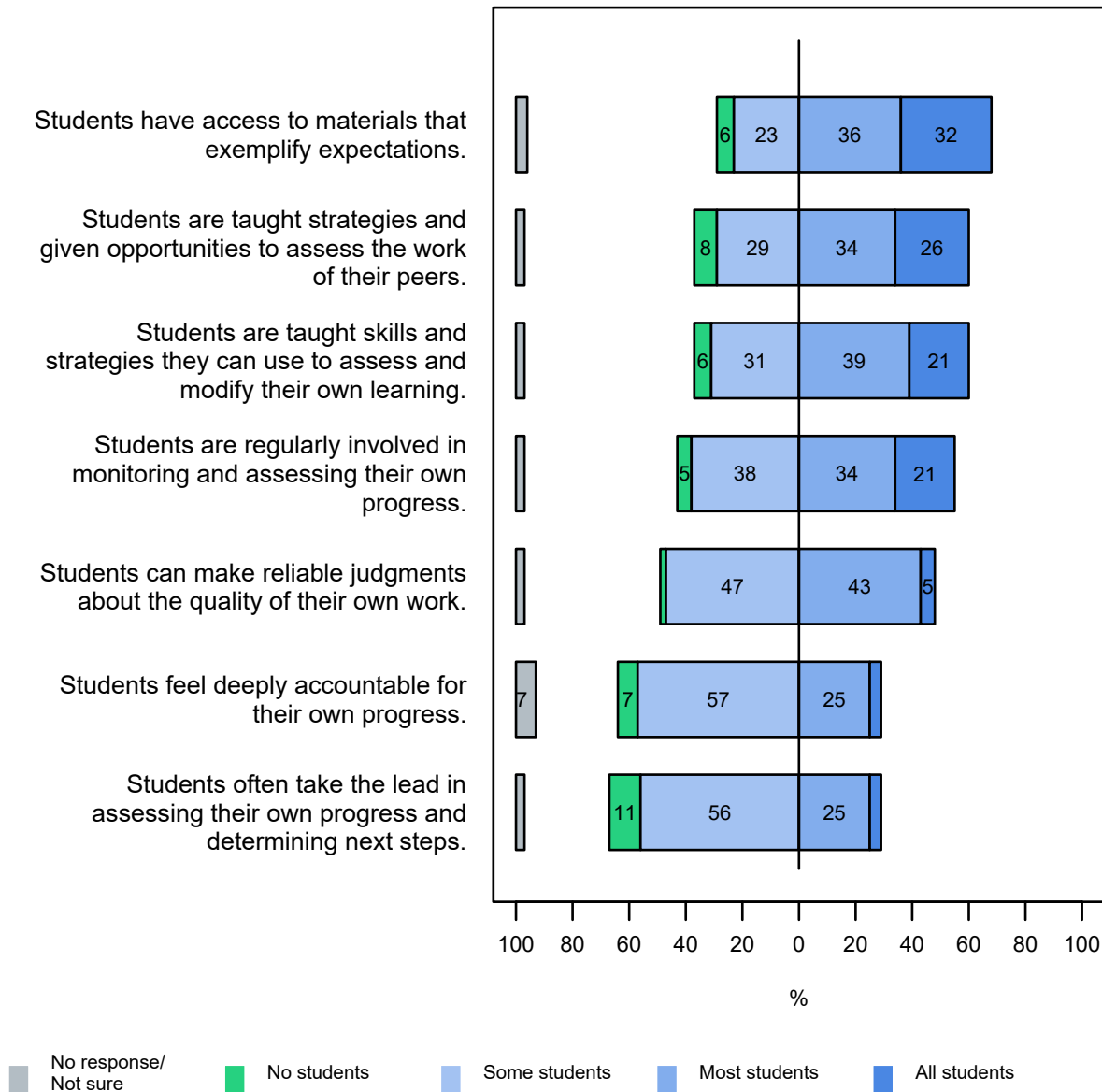
Involving students in their own assessment seems to be common in Aotearoa New Zealand primary school classrooms. Figure 28 shows that 60% or more of teachers reported that most or all of their students had access to material that exemplifies expectations, and that they were taught strategies to assess and modify their own learning, and to assess their peer's work.²⁴ Figure 28 also shows that around half the teachers reported that most or all of their students were regularly involved in monitoring and assessing their own progress, and that most or all could make reliable judgements about the quality of their own work. It was less common for most or all students to feel deeply accountable for their own progress, and often take the lead in assessing their own progress and determining next steps.

Student involvement in assessment increased with their year level, with the exception of teachers reporting that students could make reliable judgements about the quality of their work.

Regular involvement of all students in monitoring and assessing their own progress was reported more by decile 7–10 school teachers (27%, compared with 15% among decile 1–6 school teachers).

²⁴ The scale we used for this question may be more appropriate for some of the items than others, and teachers may have interpreted the question as being about student responses to their teaching and opportunities to self-assess.

FIGURE 28 Students using assessment to improve their learning (Teachers, n = 620)



Assessment information is valued, but takes time to collect

Primary teachers generally see the assessment they do as valuable and providing dependable information, though they were somewhat less positive about the time and energy needed to collect assessment information. Figure 29 also shows that formative assessment is part and parcel of day-to-day teaching. Use of standardised assessments to inform teaching programmes was reported by 75% of the teachers.

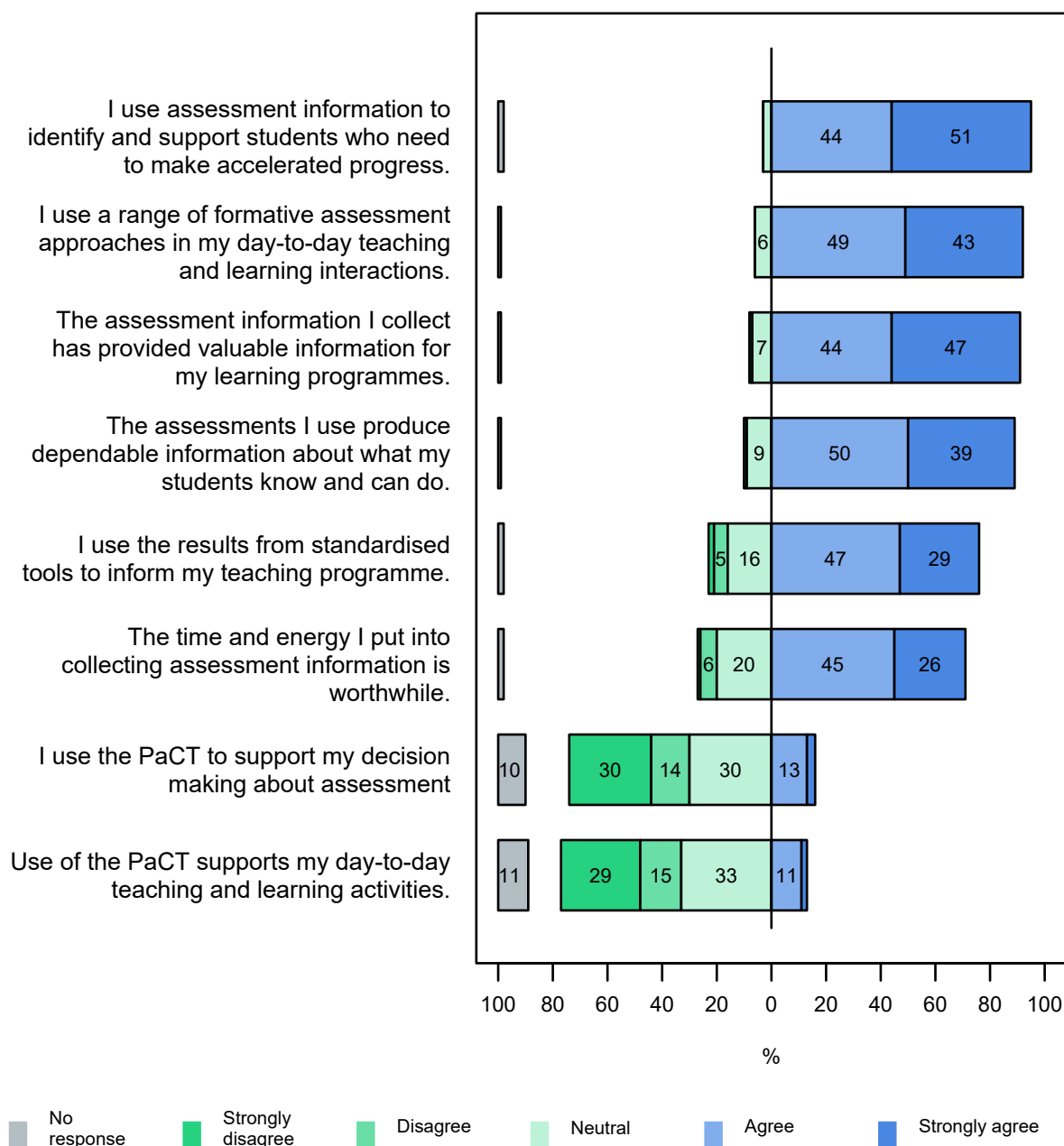
Use of the online PaCT (Progress and Consistency Tool) remains low. PaCT was designed to support overall teacher judgements for the National Standards, which were no longer required from 2018.²⁵ However, this

²⁵ The controversy around their introduction, and evidence around their impact can be found in Bonne, L. (2017). *National standards in their seventh year*. NZCER. <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/NZCER%20National%20Standards%20Report.pdf> and Thrupp, M. (2017). *The search for better educational standards: a cautionary tale*. Springer International Publishing.

tool to chart student progress was not widely taken up or tried because of distrust that the data from it would become the sole measure of student learning and school quality, and used to compare and rank schools, exacerbating competition between schools.

In 2019, school decile was related to use of PaCT—29% of decile 1 and 2 teachers indicated its use to support their decision making about assessment, decreasing to 10% of decile 9 and 10 teachers.

FIGURE 29 Assessment sources and uses (Teachers, n = 620)

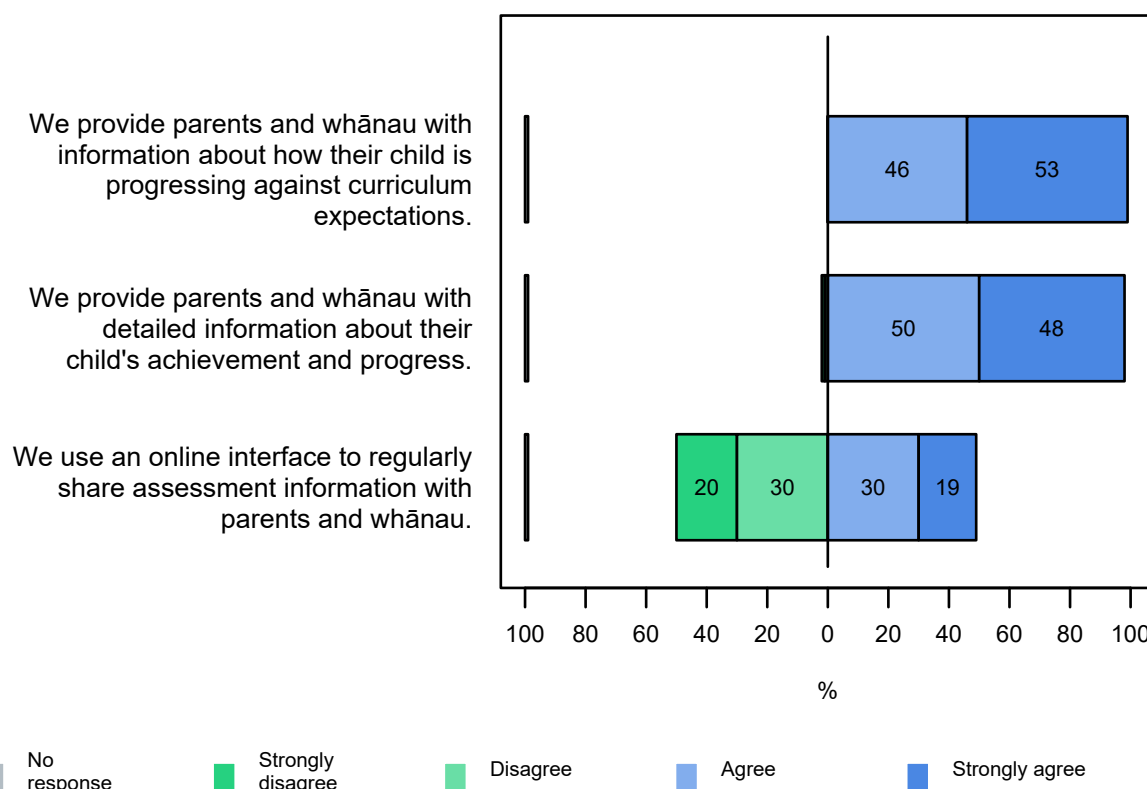


Mixed use of online reporting of child progress to parents and whānau

Around half the principals strongly agreed, and almost all the rest agreed, that they provided parents and whānau with detailed information about their child's achievement and progress, and how they were progressing against curriculum expectations. Just a few principals thought they were not providing parents and whānau with such information.

Regular use of an online interface for sharing assessment information is still not common. Figure 30 has the details.

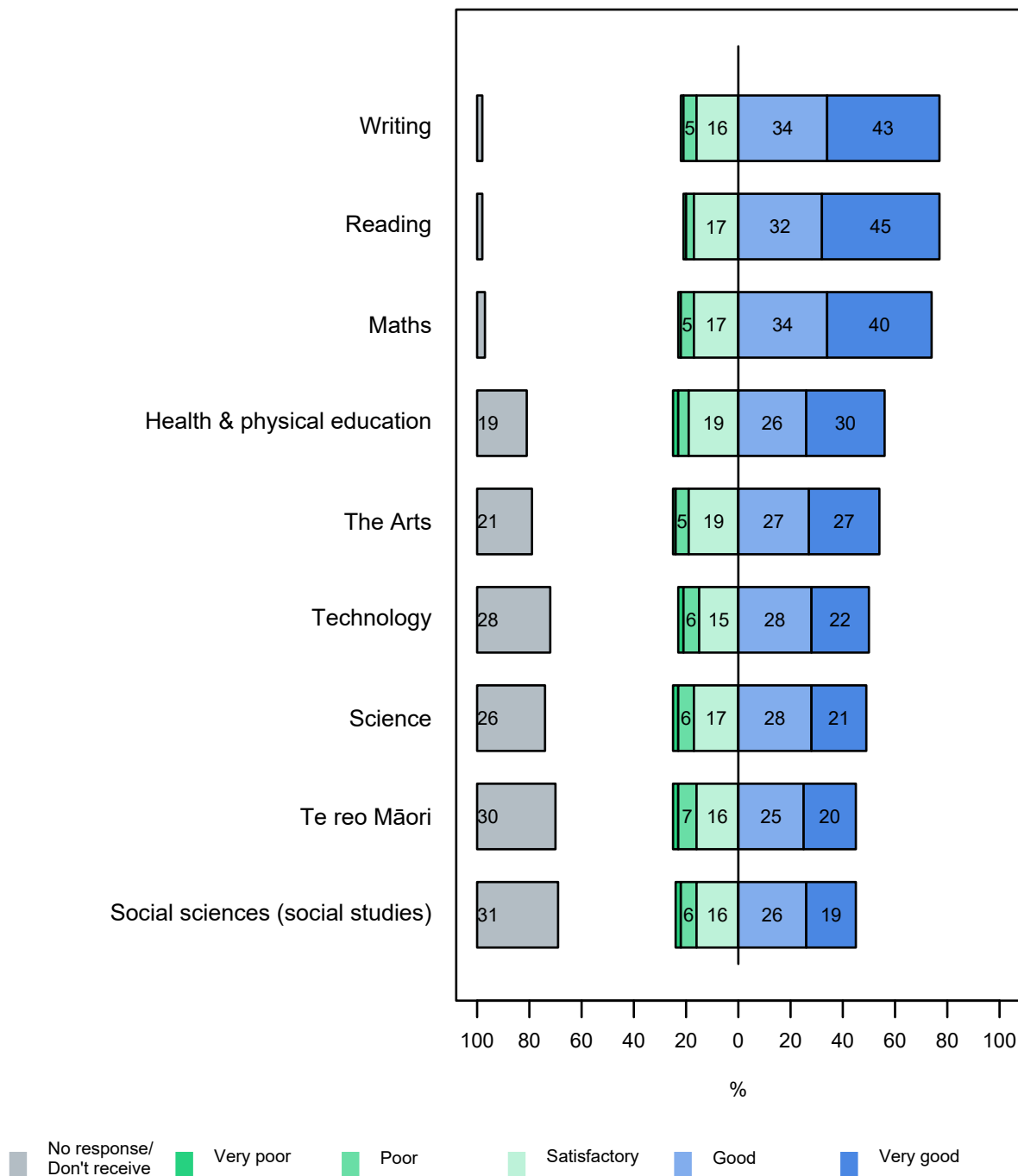
FIGURE 30 School reporting to parents and whānau about their child's progress (Principals, $n = 145$)



Parents and whānau are largely positive about the information they get about their child's progress but a significant minority do not get information about all curriculum areas

The parents and whānau taking part in the national survey 2019 were largely positive about the information they received about their child's progress in reading, writing, and mathematics. About a fifth were not. Figure 31 shows their views of the quality and clarity of this information. It also shows that other aspects of NZC including science, the arts, social sciences, and health and physical education were not as well covered in the reports that parents and whānau get about their child's progress. This is likely to reflect the need for national level curriculum work on what progression looks like across NZC, as identified by the Curriculum, Progress and Achievement Ministerial Advisory Group.

FIGURE 31 Parent views of the quality and clarity of information about their child's progress (n = 395)

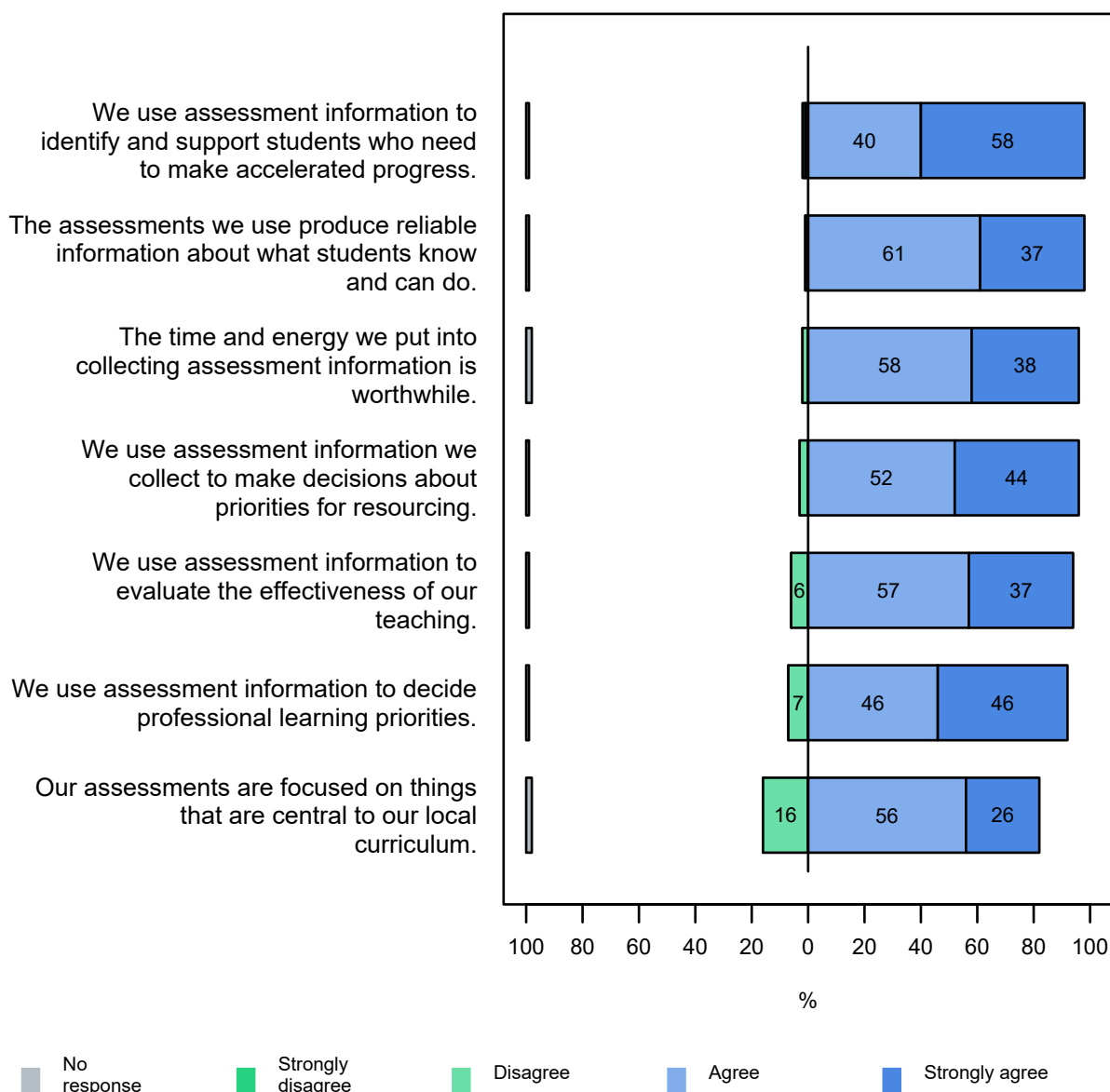


Student assessment information is important for schools

We asked principals for their thoughts about the usefulness of student assessment information, and how they use that information. Figure 32 shows that principals agreed with most of the items here, though 16% disagreed that their assessments were focused on things central to the school's local curriculum.

The main uses of assessment information at the 'strongly agree' level were to identify and support students who need to make accelerated progress, followed by deciding priorities for professional learning and resourcing, then to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's teaching. The proportions of principals who 'strongly agree' that the time and energy put into collecting assessment information, or that the assessments used produce reliable information about what students know and can do, were somewhat lower.

FIGURE 32 Use and usefulness of student assessment information (Principals, n = 145)



Inquiry, values, student agency, and digital fluency are common in schools' NZC-related professional learning or change in teaching practice

Schools' decisions on their professional learning reflect both what is available to them through Ministry-funded contracts, and what they can spend from their operational funding and any additional money they have. The Ministry of Education funding for school professional learning changed from 2017. Limited priority areas were identified, local panels of the Ministry and professionals decided regional allocations, and schools chose their provider from a list of accredited providers.

In 2013 we began asking principals about what their school focused on in their NZC-related professional learning and/or change in teaching practice, other than the perennial maths, reading, and writing. We included some new items in 2019 to reflect what we were hearing about Kāhui Ako and schools' interests and new national emphases, such as student wellbeing, and digital fluency.

Table 6 shows that these new items were more to the fore than items we asked about in 2013 and 2016, with the exception of teaching as inquiry.

Schools were also focusing more on te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, and key competencies, than they were in 2016 or 2013. There were hints of more attention being paid to inclusion, though not significantly different from 2016 or 2013.

TABLE 6 **School focus for professional learning and/or change in teaching practice for last 2 years related to NZC other than reading, writing, or maths**

NZC aspect	2013 principals (n = 180)	2016 principals (n = 200)	2019 principals (n = 145)
Teaching as inquiry	63	78	70
Values	*	*	62
Student agency	*	*	61
Digital fluency [^]	*	*	54
Student wellbeing	*	*	52
Key competencies	34	34	50
Te reo Māori and tikanga Māori	29	38	50
Learning progression	*	*	47
Formative assessment /assessment for learning	34	42	39
Integrating learning areas	31	29	37
Learning to learn	23	26	23
Inclusion	17	17	23
Science capabilities	*	25	18

[^] We asked about e-learning in previous surveys: this had been a focus for 39% of schools in 2013, and 45% in 2016.

*Not asked

There was quite a range in the number of these 13 focuses that principals said their school had focused on in their professional learning and/or changes: 3% of principals identified a single focus over the last 2 years; 5% identified 12 or 13. Most schools had paid attention to between three and seven of these professional learning or teaching practice change focuses.

Principals who used Ministry of Education support for local curriculum design were largely positive about it

The National Curriculum provides an overall framework within which Kaiako (teachers) and Tumuaki (leaders) can make decisions about content and context. Through these decisions (using the National Curriculum), they design local curricula that reflect the needs, interests and priorities of their students, whānau and the community. (Curriculum, Progress, and Achievement Ministerial Advisory Group report, June 2019, p. 7).

Designing local curriculum at the school level has not been without issue, and concerns have been raised about inequities in student experiences that may be related to what different schools decide is important, and how those decisions are made. In 2019, the Ministry of Education provided professional development and online guidelines.²⁶

Our 2019 survey questions related to the national curriculum focused around the use of this Ministry support, and what professional learning schools were doing that was related to NZC, reported above.

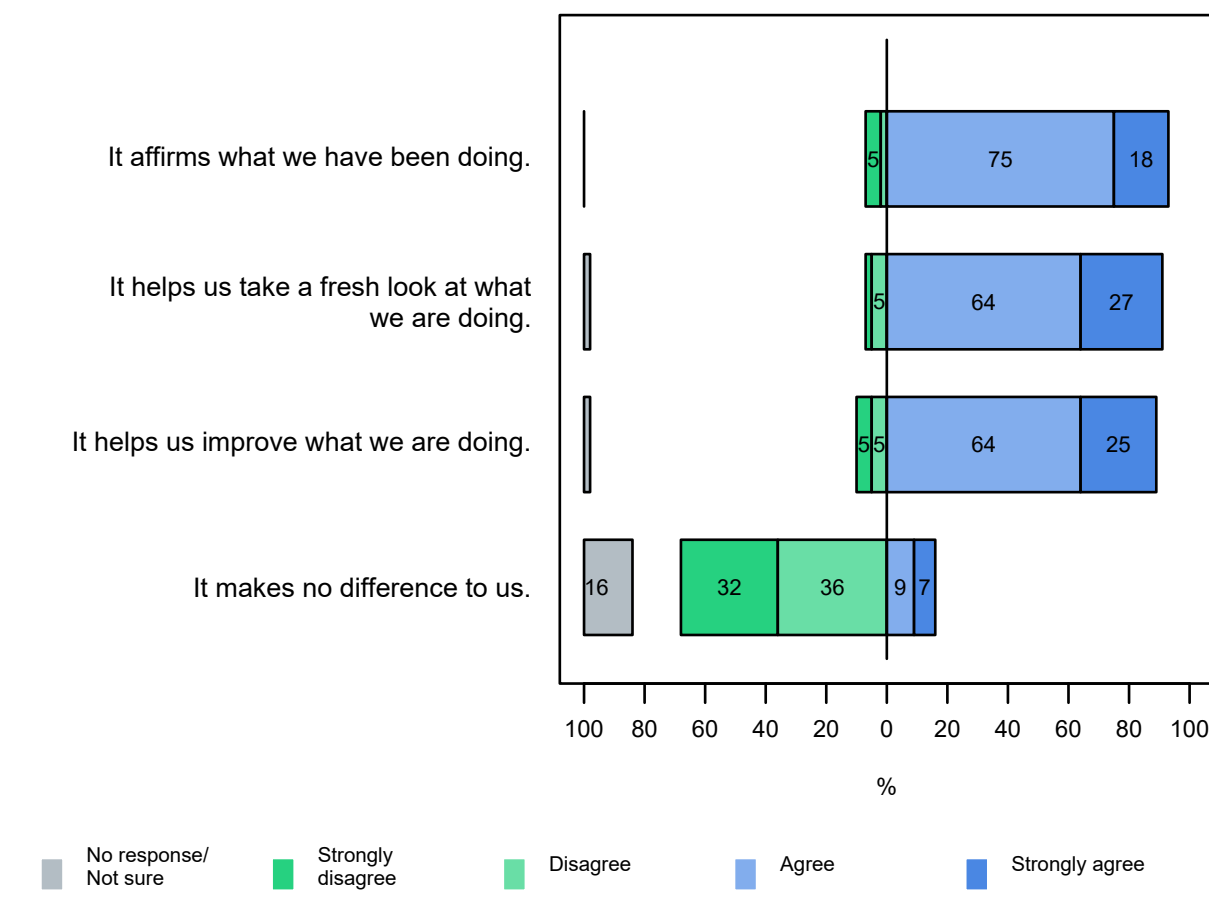
Thirty percent of the principals had used Ministry of Education support in relation to local curriculum design.

- 19% of all the principals responding had used the Local Curriculum Design material from the Ministry of Education (online)
- 19% participated in a Local Curriculum Design workshop
- 15% used the Local Curriculum Design toolkit on their own
- 5% used the Local Curriculum Design digital toolkit with schools in their Kāhui Ako.

We asked those who had used Ministry support to rate their agreement about the support (Figure 33). Some other principals also responded to this bank of questions. On the whole, principals who had used this support were positive about it, with a quarter strongly agreeing with the statements. It both affirmed what they had been doing, as well as giving them a fresh look at that work, and helping them to improve it. Few said it made no difference to them.

26 <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Strengthening-local-curriculum/Leading-local-curriculum-guide-series>

FIGURE 33 Principal views of Ministry-funded local curriculum design support (n = 65)



Thirty principals made comments in response to an open-ended question about their work around local curriculum design. These ranged widely. Some had been focusing on this for some time, and some of these were doubtful that the current Ministry tools would add value to what they saw as essentially local. Others planned to start local curriculum design work in 2020.

Some found the local curriculum workshop they had been to or the online material useful; others did not. There was disappointment for some when their applications for PLD funding to work on local curriculum design were declined. Examples of views:

Concise. Focused booklets. Asks the right questions.

Wish it was better supported to unpack the toolkit. PLD application for this was turned down.

The PD providers were very poor—read from the MOE produced material and added no new insight.

Several spoke of positive experiences working as a Kāhui Ako/Community of Learning:

Working with facilitators through our CoL has assisted us greatly giving all a sense of local identity and using the Ngāti Kahungunu curriculum has strengthened identity.

Our question about the results of schools' Kāhui Ako involvement included a question on whether they were doing some useful work on a shared local curriculum: 31% of principals whose school belonged to a Kāhui Ako said they were, 31% were neutral, and 22% disagreed. (Figure 57 in Section 12 has the details in the context of other Kāhui Ako work.)

In another bank of questions about student assessment, 26% of principals strongly agreed and 56% agreed that their student assessments were focused on things that were central to their school's local curriculum; 16% disagreed.

Summary

This national picture of some key learning opportunities for students, how their learning is assessed and reported, and what primary schools have focused on in their professional learning or change in teaching practice, underline the importance of improving clarity and support for schools. Teachers' and principals' answers here indicate that they value the greater emphasis that came with the *New Zealand Curriculum* on thinking about teaching in terms of how students learn, and find that assessment can be used to improve not only individual student progress but also as a learning resource for teachers and principals to keep improving their practice.

But taking science as a key example, it is concerning that it is not a focus in school professional learning or change, and a substantial minority of parents and whānau do not get clear or quality information about their child's science progress. The National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) shows that "most students at Year 8 are not making enough progress in science".²⁷ Providing some resources online for teachers and schools is not enough to ensure that the NZC is strong in every school so that students can progress in all learning areas. Deeper connecting schools with expertise, and sharing across schools, is needed.

27 <https://scienceonline.tki.org.nz/What-do-my-students-need-to-learn/Progress-and-Achievement-in-Science>