
2.

Introduction

This report presents the main findings from NZCER's latest survey of secondary schools, conducted in August and September 2018. We have done these surveys every 3 years since 2003. They provide a comprehensive national picture of what is happening in our schools, how things have changed over time, and the impact of policy changes. They provide insight into how teachers, principals, trustees, and parents and whānau experience our secondary education system.

These national surveys are part of NZCER's Te Pae Tawhiti grant, funded through the Ministry of Education. We get strong support from sector groups who encourage their members to fill out the surveys, and the Ministry of Education and the sector groups also give us very useful feedback on our draft surveys. We see the role of these surveys as being to provide a resource to inform work in practice, policy, and research.

The NZCER national survey of secondary schools 2018 was conducted against a backdrop of the new Government's significant work programme involving public consultation in relation to setting a vision for education for the next 30 years. This programme included a major review of NCEA, and the "Tomorrow's Schools" schooling system of the past 30 years. As well, the Education Workforce Strategy group worked on both the immediate issues of teacher shortages and workload issues, and planning for the future. The Post-Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) representing secondary teachers and principals was readying for contract negotiations with the Ministry of Education and signalling the need for considerable salary improvements.

Surveys went to the principal, to the board of trustees chair, and one other trustee (we ask the board chair to give the survey to someone whose opinion might differ from their own) at all 314 state and state-integrated secondary schools in New Zealand; and to a random sample of 12 teachers and a random sample of 20 parents at a cross-section of 188 (60%) of these schools.

We are conscious of the many calls on people's time, and that workload is an issue for teachers and principals. In 2018, we reduced the length of the surveys, in some cases omitting questions that have been included over several survey rounds. Other questions were removed because they are now asked elsewhere.¹ The survey questions are a combination of long-standing questions and new ones, to identify changes over time as well as reflecting current policy initiatives.

In 2018, we made changes to the way we sample teachers and parents, and shifted the trustee survey from paper to an online survey. The principal, teacher, and parent surveys continued to be paper-based.

¹ The Teaching and School Practices (TSP) survey includes a number of items that were included in the national survey of secondary schools in 2015. For more details about the TSP tool, see: <https://www.nzcer.org.nz/research/teaching-and-school-practices-survey-tool-tsp>

We stayed with paper surveys for principals and teachers because the surveys cover more ground than most online surveys, and paper surveys are easy to complete over several sessions and provide a visual reminder that the survey is yet to be completed.

In 2018, 167 principals completed surveys, a response rate of 53%. There was a slight under-representation of principals at decile 1–2 schools, as there had also been in 2015. The margin of error² for the principals' responses is 7.6%.

The response rate for teachers was 31% ($n = 705$), from teachers at 132 schools. Teachers at decile 3–4 schools were somewhat over-represented and, to a lesser extent, teachers at decile 7–8 schools were under-represented in 2018. The margin of error for the teachers' responses is around 3.7%.

The response rate for trustees was 22% ($n = 138$), from trustees on the boards of 97 schools. Trustees at decile 1–2 schools were under-represented, and trustees at decile 7–8 schools were somewhat over-represented. Responses from trustees at rural and town schools were proportionally lower than the national picture of secondary schools. We have therefore chosen not to report differences in trustees' responses that are related to school decile or location. The margin of error for the trustees' responses is around 8.3%.

We received 508 completed surveys from parents and whānau, with children attending 121 schools. This represents a response rate of 14%. Parents with university qualifications were over-represented, with nearly half having at least a Bachelor's degree. Parents with children at decile 1–2 schools were under-represented, and those with children at decile 7–8 schools were somewhat over-represented, although both to a lesser degree than when the previous methodology was applied in 2015. The margin of error for the parent and whānau responses is around 4.3%.

Overall, the characteristics of the schools of the principals, teachers, and parents who responded were representative of the national characteristics of state and state-integrated secondary schools, with the school decile exceptions described above. The relatively low response rates, especially for teachers, trustees, and parents, mean some caution needs to be taken when generalising from the survey findings. Further details of the sampling, margin of error, and survey methodology are in the Appendix

We focus on the overall picture for each respondent group: it is not our purpose to report responses from the principal, teachers, trustees, and parents associated with individual schools.

Reading the report

This report includes findings from principal, teacher, trustee, and parent and whānau surveys. Each survey comprised combinations of mostly closed or Likert-type questions (where respondents use a scale of response options to indicate, for example, how much they agree with a series of statements), with a small number of open questions.

The survey runs every 3 years, and part of our focus is on change from one survey round to the next by comparing responses to questions that are repeated. In some cases, comparisons are made between different groups' responses in 2018.

² The margin of error is half the width of the 95% confidence interval for a particular statistic from a survey. If the margin of error for the principal survey is 7.6%, we can be 95% sure that the "true" response of this group lies within 7.6% of the statistics we report (plus or minus 7.6%). The margin of error we report for each survey is the maximum margin of error.

In this report, we also discuss statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) in responses related to school socioeconomic decile,³ and, to a lesser degree, school location.⁴ These two school characteristics were associated with some different response patterns in the 2015 survey, and we are interested in seeing whether or not these differences are still evident in 2018. A small number of isolated school decile-related differences that are evident in 2018 suggest that some other characteristic or situation of the school may also be playing a role.

We also report statistically significant differences for parents who identify as Māori ($n = 52$) compared with non-Māori. Apart from those who identify as NZ European/Pākehā, Māori parents were the only ethnicity group with sufficient numbers for this analysis.

Where responses are common across the majority of a respondent group, we use terms such as “nearly all”, “most”, or “many” respondents. Where there is a smaller group of respondents (around a quarter to half) who report similar practices, perspectives, or suggestions, we use the term “some”. To describe changes from one survey round to the next, we use the expression “increased (or decreased) slightly” to refer to changes of around 5–7 percentage points, and “increased (or decreased) somewhat” to describe change of around 8 percentage points or more.⁵

Responses to open questions are quoted to illustrate key themes. The text or grammar of quotes may have been edited or altered slightly to enhance readability.

Report structure

We start with secondary schools’ approaches to promoting students’ wellbeing and belonging—an area that is receiving serious attention in New Zealand (Section 3). The learning experiences teachers provide for students, including those who develop the key competencies, are the focus of Section 4. The role of teaching and learning with digital technology is also a focus for reporting here. Section 5 reports the current arrangements schools make for curriculum provision in terms of school timetabling and integrating learning areas, and how the roles of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) and NCEA are seen.

Teachers’ perspectives on their work, their morale and workload, and changes they would like to make to their work are included in Section 6. Principals’ perspectives follow in Section 7, which also reports on the pathways they take to principalship, and the support they draw on for the role.

Principals’ experiences of ERO, advice from government agencies, and views on the availability of external expertise are the focus of Section 8. Principals’ and trustees’ views are both reported in Section 9, which looks at schools’ interactions and collaborations, including Kāhui Ako.

We hear more of trustees’ perspectives in Section 10, this time focusing on their role. Parent and whānau views about their child’s school, the information they receive from the school, and parents’ involvement with the school are reported in Section 11.

The final section reports what principals and trustees identify as the major issues facing secondary schools in 2018, and some of the effective actions schools have been taking to address some long-standing equity issues.

3 School decile indicates the proportion of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, with decile 1 schools having the highest proportion, and decile 10 schools the lowest proportion. We grouped the schools into decile bands for analysis purposes: decile 1–2; decile 3–4; decile 5–6; decile 7–8; decile 9–10. We describe the data as “increasing to” to signify graduated increases from one band to another. We occasionally report larger groupings, such as deciles 5–10, where there is consistency across a larger grouping of deciles.

4 The school location categories we report are: rural schools, schools in towns, schools in small cities, and metropolitan schools.

5 These percentage points apply to the teacher and parent and whānau respondent groups. Principals and trustees are smaller groups, so for their responses we use the expression “increased (or decreased) slightly” to refer to changes of around 10–12 percentage points, and “increased (or decreased) somewhat” to describe change of around 13 percentage points or more.