12.

Issues facing secondary schools in 2018

In this section we look at key aspects of school viability in terms of funding, staffing, competition for student numbers, and school buildings. Stability in student numbers allows the stability in funding and staffing that also supports stable development of teaching and learning. Growth in student numbers can also support ongoing development of schools' core work, provided it occurs at a manageable pace. We also report on what principals and trustees think are the major issues facing their school. The section concludes with what principals say are the most effective things their schools have been doing to address some long-standing equity issues for schools: what can be done to improve outcomes for Māori students and Pacific students, and to improve the integration of students with learning needs.

Funding

A small minority of the principals say government funding is enough to meet their school's needs

In 2018, 8% of principals consider their school's government funding is enough to meet its needs.[66]

Sixty percent of principals (*n* = 100) said they had to reduce spending in 2018, up from 46% in 2015. These reductions had negative effects on schools':
- provision of co-curricular experiences (63% of those who had cut school spending)
- quality of curriculum resourcing (54%)
- practical components of courses (43%)
- curriculum options offered in Years 11–13 (37%)
- curriculum options offered in Years 9 and 10 (24%).

Many principals (86%) say they have some students left out of co-curricular experiences when parents are asked to pay the cost of these experiences.

Over half (55%) of all principals responding say their school relies on attracting international students so that it can provide a good breadth of courses, very similar to the proportion in 2015.[67] In 2018, we asked for the first time if the school would be in financial difficulty without this income. Fifty-five percent of the principals also agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

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66 This is not significantly different from 14% of principals in 2015, 5% in 2012, and 3% in 2009.
67 The scale changed in the 2018 survey, with the addition of a "Neutral" response. Eleven percent of principals selected this option. The proportion of principals who strongly agreed or agreed remained similar to 2015.

More principals report stability in school finances, but fewer report improvement

The proportion of principals reporting that their school finances were looking much the same as the previous year continues to increase (57% in 2018, 48% in 2015, 22% in 2012). Thirty-eight percent reported that their financial situation looked worse than in 2017 (similar to the 35% in 2015), and 5% that it looked better (down from 17% in 2015).

Differences related to school decile

Overall, there were fewer decile-related differences in what principals said about their schools' financial situations in 2018 than in 2015. In 2015, financial stability increased with school decile (i.e., higher decile schools had the most stable financial situation), but this association was not apparent in the 2018 data.

A higher proportion of the principals of decile 7–10 schools say they rely on income from international students than principals of decile 1–6 schools.[68] Seventy-three percent of principals leading decile 9–10 schools agreed or strongly agreed that they rely on income from this source to provide a good breadth of courses,[69] compared with 70% of principals of decile 7–8 schools, 55% of principals of decile 5–6 schools, 38% of principals of decile 3–4 schools, and 32% of principals of decile 1–2 schools.[70] Principals from higher decile schools are also more likely to report that the school would be in financial difficulty without income from international students (78% of principals of decile 7–8 schools and 70% of principals of decile 9–10 schools, compared with 21% of principals of decile 1–2 schools).

Eighty percent of principals of decile 9–10 schools strongly agreed that the school's use of digital technology for learning depends on parents providing devices, as did 75% of principals of decile 7–8 schools, and 60% of principals of decile 5–6 schools. This compares with 37% of principals of decile 1–2 schools, and 32% of principals of decile 3–4 schools.

In 2015, there was an association between school decile and the proportion of principals who reported that some students missed out on co-curricular activities when parents were asked to pay costs. This year there was no decile-related difference. Neither did a decile-related difference remain for whether a principal reported they had had to reduce spending in 2018.

Staffing

A minority of secondary principals consider their school's teaching staffing entitlement is enough to meet the school's needs

The proportion of principals who report their staffing entitlement is sufficient continues to decline. In 2018, 13% report this down from 24% in 2015 and the lowest proportion since 2003.

Many (78% of the principals) employed more teaching staff than their entitlement. In many cases, these additional staff taught a learning area (83% of these schools, up from 72% in 2015). Other roles undertaken by these additional staff were:
- working with students whose English was an additional language (45%)
- working with international students (39%)
- working with students with additional needs or needing learning assistance (39%)
- providing literacy or numeracy support (32%)

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68 There is also an association with school location, with principals of metropolitan schools more likely to strongly agree that they rely on income from international students than those in other locations.
69 This is somewhat less than the 81% in 2015.
70 This is a large increase from 5% of decile 1–2 principals in 2015. However, small numbers are involved—these data represent just one principal in 2015 and six principals in 2018.

- pastoral care (31%)
- te reo Māori support (15%)
- Gateway or careers work (14%)
- music or other arts tuition (13%).

Over half the principals have difficulty finding teachers of te reo Māori

In 2018, we asked principals if they had difficulty finding teachers of te reo Māori, and if so, at which language levels: 8% have difficulty finding those who can teach te reo Māori at a high level, 38% have difficulty finding those who can teach the language at a basic level, and 35% have difficulty finding those who can teach the language at a moderate level. Overall, 61% have difficulty finding te reo Māori teachers: 19% at all language levels, 11% at two of these levels, and 31% at one of these levels.[71] Difficulty finding te reo Māori teachers was unrelated to school decile or location.

School roll and competition

Almost two-thirds of secondary schools have places for all students who apply

Most secondary schools (81%) are directly competing with a median of four other secondary schools for students. This is unchanged since 2012. Sixty-four percent of schools have places for all students who apply. The number of schools with an enrolment scheme remains around 40%: this year it is 44%, with another 4% thinking about it (this is the first year we have included the response option, "thinking about it").

While a quarter of these schools with enrolment schemes draw only up to 5% of their students from beyond their zone, 28% draw 6%–20% of their students from beyond their zone, 20% draw 21%–40% and 20% draw more than 40% of their students from out of zone.

Differences related to school decile and location

Competition for students is experienced across all school deciles, although lower decile schools are more likely to have places for all students who apply (see Figure 57). Compared with 2015, more decile 9–10 schools have places for all who apply than was reported in 2015 (47%, compared with 28%), and fewer decile 5–8 schools have places for all who apply.[72]

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71 These proportions are higher than those who reported difficulty in finding te reo Māori teachers in 2015, but this may in part be because the survey question changed from being a question about finding suitable teachers across a range of areas, to a question only about te reo Māori teachers. In 2015, 31% had difficulty finding te reo Māori teachers, 9% at all three language levels, 3% at two of these levels, and 19% at one of these levels.

72 Documentation of how low-decile schools have lost students over the past 20 years and high decile schools have grown is given in Gordon, L. (2015). 'Rich' and 'poor' schools revisited. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies, 50*(1), 7–22.

FIGURE 57 **Secondary schools with places for all students who apply, by school decile**
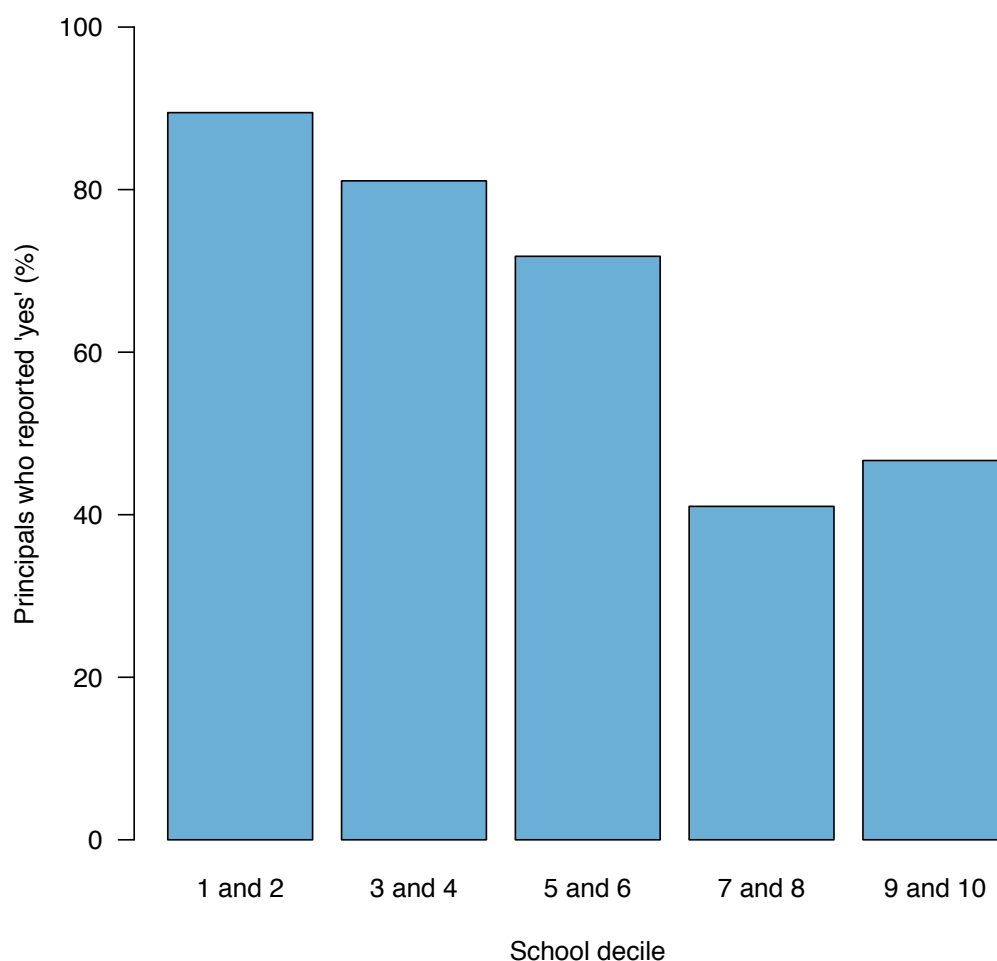
Enrolment schemes also followed school decile, ranging from 87% of the decile 9–10 schools having one (up from 72% in 2015), to 21% of the decile 1–2 schools (no change from 2015).

One-third of metropolitan schools did not have places for all the students who applied to them, compared with 22% of small-city schools. Just one town school and one rural school did not have places for all students who applied. Fourteen percent of town schools, a third of small-city schools, and 60% of metropolitan schools had an enrolment scheme. No rural schools did.

School property

A new set of questions in 2018 asked principals about the current picture of their school buildings (see Figure 58).

Just under half of the principals are positive about the condition of their school buildings

Principals are fairly evenly split about whether their buildings are in good condition: 45% agree they are, and 38% disagree, and 17% are neutral.

A small minority (11%) have modern learning environments throughout the school, and only 28% of secondary principals agree they have sufficient flexibility for teaching and learning needs (a fifth are neutral, and half disagree). Just over half of principals agree they have sufficient space for all classes.

FIGURE 58 **Principals' views on their school buildings (*n* = 167)**
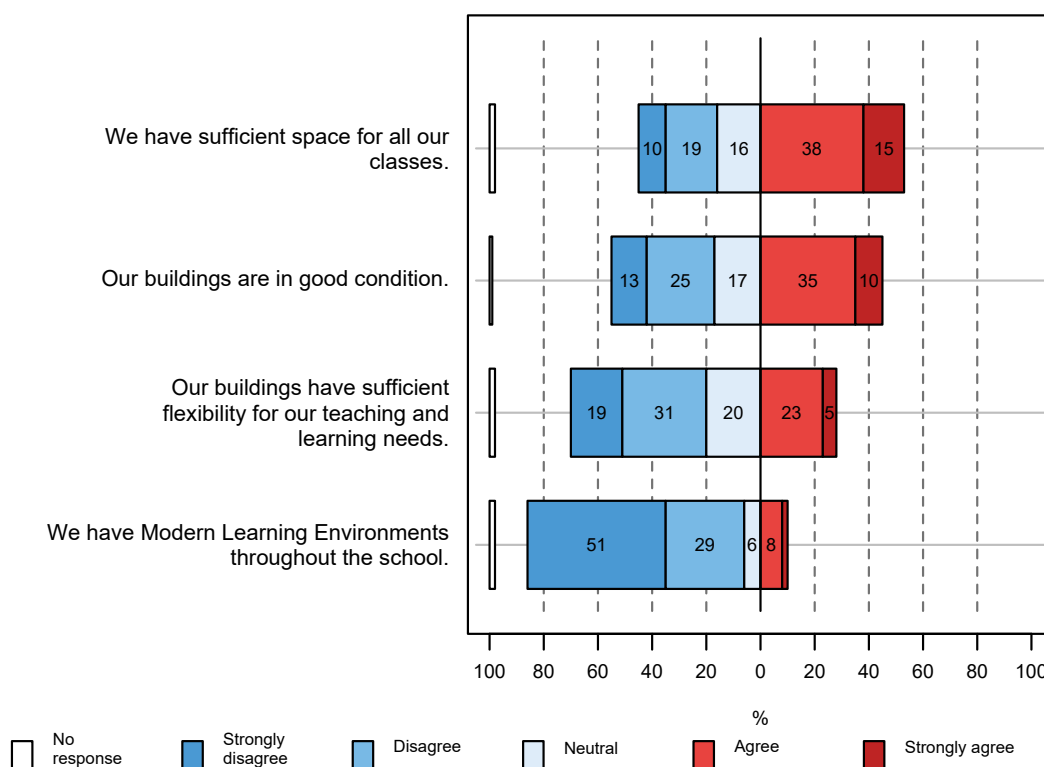
Differences related to school decile

Two statements show differences related to school decile. Principals of decile 1–2 schools are more likely than principals from schools of all other deciles to agree that they have Modern Learning Environments throughout the school (32% agree, compared with 3%–13% of principals from other deciles). The level of agreement with having sufficient space for all classes shows a clear pattern based on school decile: 79% of principals of decile 1–2 schools agree they have sufficient space, declining to 68% of principals of decile 3–4 schools, 55% of principals of decile 5–6 schools, 35% of principals of decile 7–8 schools, and 40% of principals of decile 9–10 schools. This is consistent with the earlier finding that lower decile schools are more likely to have places for all students who apply.

Major issues facing schools

We asked principals and trustees which of 19 items they thought were the major issues facing their school. They could select as many issues as applied to their school. Table 42 brings together the picture from both groups, with the "top 10" issues in bold. Principals identified more issues than trustees.[73] Nine of the top 10 issues are the same across both principals and trustees.

Two issues that are new to the survey are foremost for principals: recruiting quality teachers, and providing support for vulnerable students (e.g., with wellbeing or mental health needs). Both are about provision that enables and provides a strong foundation for teaching and learning within the school. Resources—physical, human, and financial—are the prime concerns for trustees: property, recruiting quality teachers, and funding.

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73 Principals selected a median of eight issues, and trustees a median of six issues.

Recruiting quality teachers is the top issue identified by principals

In 2015, recruiting and retaining quality teachers was combined into one issue, "attracting and keeping good teachers". In 2018, this was separated into two issues—recruiting quality teachers and retaining quality teachers. Recruiting quality teachers was the top issue for principals (identified by 73%), and second issue for trustees (identified by half of trustees).[74] Retaining quality teachers is less of an issue than recruiting quality teachers.

Providing support for vulnerable students is the second issue identified by principals

Providing support for vulnerable students was the second most identified issue by principals (66%); and in the top 10 for trustees (39%). This has emerged as a key theme throughout this report.[75]

Funding is an issue for more principals and trustees in 2018

Funding is identified by a higher proportion of principals and trustees than it was in 2015 (64% of principals, compared with 51% in 2015; 47% of trustees, compared with 37% in 2015). However, it is still not as high as in 2009 when it was identified by 86% of principals and 84% of trustees, and 2012 when it was identified by 76% of principals and 68% of trustees.

Issues related to digital technology remain in the top 10 for both groups: cost of maintenance and replacement, and dealing with the inappropriate use of technology.

The downward trend in student behaviour being a major issue for schools has not continued

In 2015, we reported that concern about student behaviour has been dropping since 2009,[76] probably reflecting the emphasis and support given to schools to rethink their approach with the PB4L strategy. In 2018, while student behaviour remained quite far down the list of issues for principals and trustees, the downward trend does not continue, with 22% of principals and 23% of trustees identifying student behaviour as a major issue facing their school. Student bullying was identified as an issue by the lowest proportion of principals and trustees (11% and 7%).

Table 42 below gives the full set of issues identified by principals and trustees, with the top 10 for each group in bold.

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74 Compared with 26% of principals and 18% of trustees who selected "attracting and keeping good teachers" in 2015.
75 See Section *3: Promoting students' wellbeing*.
76 Thirty-three percent of principals in 2009, 26% of principals in 2012, and 15% of principals in 2015 identified student behaviour as a major issue facing their school.

TABLE 42 **Major issues facing secondary schools in 2018, reported by principals and trustees**

Issue	Principals (*n* = 167) %	Trustees (*n* = 138) %
Recruiting quality teachers	**73**	**50**
Providing support for vulnerable students (e.g., wellbeing or mental health needs)	**66**	**39**
Funding	**64**	**47**
Too much being asked of schools	**61**	**26**
Cost of maintenance and replacement of digital technology	**55**	**28**
Property maintenance or development	**53**	**59**
Dealing with inappropriate use of technology	**48**	17
Staffing levels/class sizes	**47**	**26**
Timetabling to support a growing range of student learning opportunities	**47**	**36**
Parent and whānau engagement	**41**	**39**
Retaining quality teachers	40	22
Māori student achievement	38	**39**
Providing good curriculum options for all students	38	**29**
Achievement of students with learning support needs	28	23
Good quality PLD	27	12
Student achievement	26	23
Student behaviour	22	23
Pacific student achievement	21	19
Responding to cultural diversity	19	13
Using modern learning environments effectively	19	13
Student bullying	11	7

Note: Figures in **bold** are the "top 10" issues for each group. For trustees, there were two issues in tenth place.

Differences related to school decile

There are associations between the kinds of major issues identified and school decile.

Among principals, it is those leading decile 1–2 schools who are most likely to report issues around:
- student achievement levels (48%,77 decreasing to 7% of the principals of decile 9–10 schools)
- parent and whānau engagement (63%, decreasing to 17% of the principals of decile 9–10 schools).

The principals of decile 3–6 schools are most likely to report that student behaviour is a major issue for their school (38% of principals of decile 3–4 schools and 30% of principals of decile 5–6 schools, compared with 21% of decile 1–2 principals, 10% of decile 7–8 principals, and 7% of decile 9–10 principals).

The principals of decile 7–10 schools are most likely to report that staffing levels and class sizes are an issue for their school (67% of decile 9–10 principals, and 53% of decile 7–8 principals, compared with 40% of principals of decile 5–6 schools, 46% of principals of decile 3–4 schools, and 16% of the principals of decile 1–2 schools).

Effective actions schools are taking to increase equity

In 2018, there was almost no change in the proportions of principals identifying the achievement of Māori students (39%) or the achievement of Pacific students (19%) as a major issue for their school. Nearly one-quarter of principals identify the achievement of students with learning support needs as a major issue (23%). To help identify actions schools had taken in the past 3 years that had proven effective in improving outcomes for Māori students, and Pacific students, and integrating students with learning support needs, principals were asked three open questions.

Focusing on Māori students' learning and wellbeing is the most effective thing half the schools have done to improve Māori students' outcomes

The most effective things[78] principals think their schools have done in the past 3 years to improve outcomes for Māori students are summarised in Table 43, followed by more details where needed. Ninety-five percent of principals wrote a response to this question.

TABLE 43 **The most effective things schools have done in the past 3 years to improve outcomes for Māori students, reported by principals**

Most effective things	Principals (*n* = 167) %
Focusing on Māori students' learning and wellbeing	56
Considering the needs of Māori students when making staff appointments and decisions about professional learning for existing staff	33
Involving whānau, iwi, or local marae to support Māori students	26
Increasing access at school to te ao Māori, for all students	21
Including goals for Māori students in the school's strategic plan	4
The board of trustees prioritising equity (e.g., co-opted Māori/iwi members); insisted on laptops for all students so none are disadvantaged	3

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77 Although this is down from 90% of decile 1–2 principals in 2015 who identified student achievement as an issue.
78 Although principals were asked to name the single most effective thing, some provided a short list of things, all of which are represented in Table 43.

Over half of principals' responses indicate taking a purposeful focus on Māori students' learning and wellbeing was the most effective strategy used to improve outcomes for Māori students. Learning and wellbeing tended to be used together in principals' responses, and are closely connected, so they have been included in a single category here. The focus on Māori students' learning and wellbeing included closely monitoring the achievement of Māori students and supporting those who are identified as being at risk of under-achieving. Some principals named specific programmes that supported this focus, such as Rangatahi Ora, that aimed to support both the learning and wellbeing of Māori students. Other effective strategies principals identified as supporting their focus on Māori students' learning and wellbeing were Whānau Pūmanawa classes, tuakana–teina arrangements, mentoring, and culturally-responsive pedagogy.

One-third of principals say staffing decisions, including building their existing staff's capabilities, had been their most effective strategy for improving outcomes for Māori students. Some had appointed Kaitiaki Hauora (translates as 'guardians of health'), teachers of te reo Māori, or designated specific staff time to support Māori students' academic success. Also mentioned here were several professional learning initiatives, such as Te Kākahu, Kia Eke Panuku, and Poutama Pounamu.

For slightly fewer principals (26%), involving whānau, iwi, or local marae was the most effective thing their school had done to improve outcomes for Māori students.

Principals cited a number of ways their school had increased access to te ao Māori for all their students. These included increasing the visibility of te ao Māori in the environment, embedding Matariki as a school celebration, kapa haka, and using te reo Māori across the curriculum.

Focusing on Pacific students' learning and wellbeing is the most effective thing almost one-third of schools have done to improve Pacific students' outcomes

The most effective things principals think their schools have done to improve outcomes for Pacific students are summarised in Table 44. A smaller proportion (77%) of principals wrote responses to this question than to the same question relating to Māori students. This included 16% who commented that there was no need at their school to improve outcomes for Pacific students, some because they were on par with other students.

The actions principals identify as being effective for improving outcomes for Pacific students are similar to those they say have been effective for Māori students, although the proportions of principals who have taken these actions are smaller.

TABLE 44 **The most effective things schools have done in the past 3 years to improve outcomes for Pacific students, reported by principals**

Most effective things	Principals (*n* = 167) %
Focusing on Pacific students' learning and wellbeing	32
Considering the needs of Pacific students when making staff appointments and decisions about professional learning for existing staff	20
Involving fanau and community members to support Pacific students	16
Increasing access at school to Pacific cultures, for all students	11
The board of trustees prioritising equity (e.g., co-opted Pacific members)	2
Including goals for Pacific students in the school's strategic plan	1

Focusing on Pacific students' learning and wellbeing involved the same sorts of strategies described as effective for Māori students: tracking and supporting Pacific students' achievement; showing Pacific cultures are valued in the school; mentoring programmes; and building teachers' culturally-responsive pedagogy. An effective action one principal described was "introducing a Pasifika Studies course that has been effective in promoting a strong sense of identity".

One-fifth of principals report having their Pacific students' needs in mind when making staff appointments (e.g., Pacific teachers, dean of Pacific students) and working to improve staff's cultural competency/awareness.

For 16% of principals, involving Pacific fanau and community members to support Pacific students is the most effective thing their school had done to improve outcomes for these students.

Increasing access to Pacific cultures for all students was fostered through Pacific performing arts groups or participation in Polyfest, as well as introducing a Pacific Studies course, mentioned earlier.

Pacific students are sometimes included in approaches aimed at Māori students

Some principals' responses indicate they use largely the same approaches for Pacific students as they do for Māori students, often involving one-to-one mentoring, and building relationships with the student and their fanau.

> We have very few Pasifika (2%). They are supported in our Māori achievement plan.

> We only ever have 1 or 2 Pasifika students. We monitor their progress closely. Usually collate with Māori student data.

In half of schools, ensuring suitable staffing was the most effective thing to improve the integration of students with learning support needs

Finally, what was the most effective thing the school had done to improve the *integration* of students with learning support needs? This elicited responses from 87% of principals, summarised in Table 45. To improve the integration of these students, half of principals say the most effective thing in their school has been having suitable staffing (SENCOs, teacher aides to support these students), with some of these principals also commenting they had increased the number of teacher aides the school employs.

TABLE 45 **The most effective things schools have done in the past 3 years to improve the integration of students with learning support needs, reported by principals**

Most effective things	Principals (*n* = 167) %
Ensuring suitable staffing (e.g., SENCOs and teacher aides support these students)	50
Focusing on these students' learning and wellbeing	40
Prioritising or increasing funding to support these students	14
Work with external others, including other schools/Kāhui Ako on IEPs for transition, and RTLBs	12
Involving parents and whānau	7

For students with learning support needs, focusing on their learning and wellbeing included adapting curriculum resources, using provisions for special assessment conditions, providing a suitable digital device, and closely monitoring and supporting their learning and wellbeing.

Fourteen percent of principals report making funding decisions that prioritised the integration of students with learning support needs.

> We have been strong in this area for years. We pay for extra staffing out of our donations and some parents pay for extra assistance for extreme cases that don't qualify for funding.

> Employed a SENCO/special needs HoD. Funded additional teacher aides from board reserves.

For slightly fewer principals (12%), the most effective thing their school had done in the past 3 years to integrate students with learning support needs was to work with others, in addition to the school's SENCO and teacher aides. These included RTLBs, and educational psychologists, as well as people at contributing schools, a local special school, and other schools in the same Kāhui Ako.

Summary and discussion

Only 8% of principals consider their school's government funding is enough to meet its needs. Compared with 2015, more principals say they have had to reduce spending, and the impact of this reduced spending on curriculum options is more noticeable. Funding is identified as an issue by a higher proportion of principals than in 2015, now approaching two-thirds compared with half in 2015. Just over half the schools are also reliant on non-government resources, particularly international students. The proportion of principals who report their staffing entitlement is sufficient continues to decline.

In 2015, higher decile schools had the most stable financial situation, but this decile-related difference was not apparent in the 2018 data. Taking all the questions about funding together, it appears that funding issues are occurring across the board.

Most secondary schools are directly competing with a median of four other secondary schools for students. This is unchanged since 2012. Although competition for students is experienced across all school deciles, lower decile schools are more likely to have places for all students who apply.

A new set of questions in 2018 asked principals about the current picture of their school buildings. Responses show considerable variation, with similar proportions of principals agreeing and disagreeing that their school's buildings are in good condition. Modern Learning Environments throughout a school are not common.

Recruiting quality teachers was the top major issue facing schools. This issue did not show an association by school decile or school location—it was identified across the board. Many principals are also concerned about providing support for vulnerable students. This has been a key theme in the 2018 survey findings. In 2015, we reported that concern about student behaviour has been dropping since 2009, probably reflecting the emphasis and support given to schools to rethink their approach with the PB4L strategy. Although it still sits outside the "top 10" in a ranked list of issues, in 2018, student behaviour moved higher up the list for principals and trustees.

The achievement of Māori students, Pacific students, and students with learning support needs all continue to be a major issue for sizeable minorities of schools, with little change in the picture here since 2015. Many principals of schools that are paying attention to the needs of Māori and Pacific students indicate that taking a deliberate focus on tracking and supporting these student groups' learning and wellbeing was the most effective strategy their schools had taken for improving outcomes. In some schools, the small numbers of Pacific students are being included in initiatives designed for a larger group of Māori students. Ensuring appropriate staffing topped the list of effective actions schools had taken to improve the integration of students with learning support needs.