

# 11.

## Support and challenge

**The overall quality of a country's schools is affected by how well the government agencies responsible for education are able to provide both support and challenge for ongoing improvement.<sup>78</sup> In this chapter we start with schools' experiences of 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 principal perceptions of their interactions with the Ministry of Education and other government agencies; to school support from sector organisations; and their access to external expertise.**

### ERO experiences

Schools appear to have been improving in terms of ERO review results. Eight percent of the principals said their school's next review was to be in 1–2 years' time, compared with 14% in their previous ERO review. Twenty-five percent of the principals reported a 4–5-year review return when their school was last reviewed, compared with 15% for their previous ERO review.<sup>79</sup> Not all those who had had a 4–5-year review return in their previous review remained at this level: 39% did not. This is worth bearing in mind in light of the suggestion in the consultation document on the Update of the Education Act that schools deemed to be doing very well could be treated differently from others.

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78 Fullan, M. (2010). *All Systems Go: The Change Imperative for Whole System Reform*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

Wylie, C. (2012). *Vital connections: Why we need more than self-managing schools*. Wellington: NZCER Press.

79 This is close to ERO national figures as at 31 December 2015: 24% of secondary schools were in the 4–5-year review return category, 65% in the 3-year review return category and 10% in the 1–2-year review return category. (Data supplied by ERO, 15 March 2016.)

School socioeconomic status was associated with whether schools were currently on a 4–5-year review return, rising from 5% of decile 1–2 secondary schools to 53% of decile 9–10 schools.<sup>80</sup> Thirty percent of the decile 1–2 schools were on the 1–2-year review return.<sup>81</sup> Most of the schools that had moved from a 3-year review return in their previous ERO review to a 4–5-year review return in their most recent ERO review were decile 5–10 schools.

More schools on a current 4–5-year review return had stable leadership over a 10-year period: 89% of these schools had one or two principals in that time, compared with 66% of those on the 3-year review return cycle, and 47% of those on the 1–2-year review return.

## Experiences of ERO

Most secondary principals were positive about their interactions with ERO and ERO reviews, as shown in Figure 51 below. Many had used their last ERO review report in their strategic planning, and made changes in their school as a result of ERO's national reports. Just over half the principals said their school made changes as a result of ERO's 2014 national reports on secondary schooling. Some uncertainty remained in principals' minds about the reliability of ERO review reports as a whole.

Principals of schools currently on the 4–5-year review report cycle were more likely to strongly agree that their last ERO review had focused on goals or progress towards those goals (52%, compared with 19% of those on the 3-year review report cycle and 7% of those on the 1–2-year review report cycle). This may indicate that those schools had particularly clear goals and evidence of progress towards them: that the strategic planning processes in these schools were working effectively. Not surprisingly, higher proportions of principals whose schools were on the 4–5-year review report cycle also strongly agreed that ERO reports were reliable indicators of teaching/learning quality (30%, compared with 9% of those on the 3-year review report cycle, and none of those on the 1–2-year review report cycle), and of school improvement capacity (28%, compared with 8% of those on the 3-year review report cycle, and none of those on the 1–2-year review report cycle). Interestingly, there were no differences between the three groups of schools when it came to making use of their own review reports or national reports, suggesting that what schools are taking out of these reports—*how* they are using them—warrants a closer look.

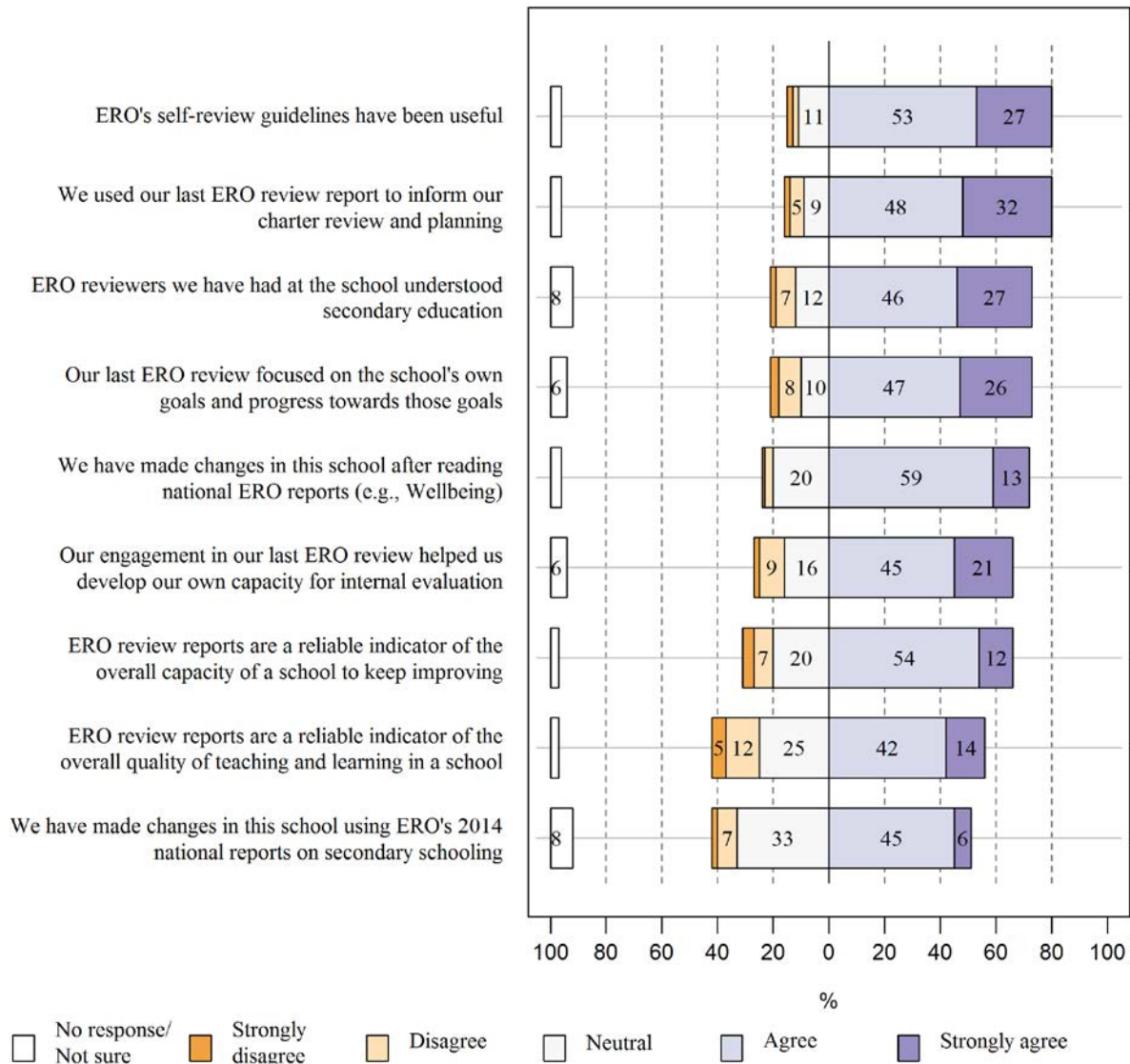
Principals' use of ERO reports and reviews and their views of ERO were largely unrelated to their school decile. Decile 9–10 schools were less likely to use their ERO review report to inform their charter review and planning (70%, compared with around 85% for other schools).

Principals took notice of new ERO publications concerning its work with schools: 88% of the secondary principals had read ERO's new evaluation indicators in their draft form, which were circulated not long before our 2015 national survey.

80 No rural principals reported their school having a 4–5-year review return, and 22% had a 1–2-year review return. However, we have responses from only nine rural principals so we report these figures with some caution. There are 15 rural secondary schools nationwide.

81 ERO national figures for secondary schools as at 31 December 2015 showed 10% of decile 1–2 schools in the 4–5-year review return category and 58% of the decile 9–10 schools; 26% of decile 1–2 schools in the 1–2-year review return category and none of the decile 9–10 schools. (Data supplied by ERO, 15 March 2016.)

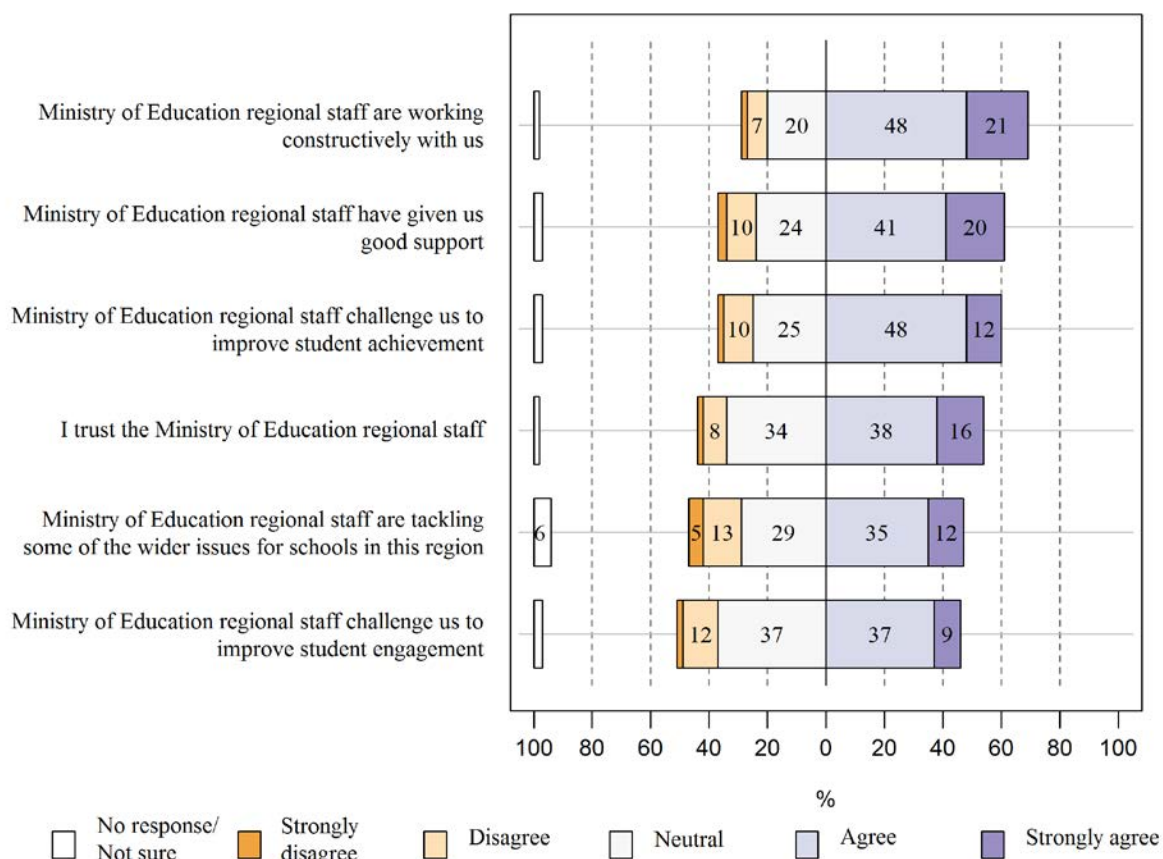
FIGURE 51 Secondary principals' views and use of ERO reviews and reports (n = 182)



## Interactions with the Ministry of Education

The Ministry of Education consolidated its regional and district offices into 10 regions several years ago, with the aim of having regional staff build a more active relationship with schools. Figure 52 shows that two-thirds of secondary principals thought Ministry of Education regional staff worked constructively with them; around half trusted them, and saw them as a source of good support and challenge to improve student engagement and achievement

FIGURE 52 Principal views of their regional Ministry of Education staff (n = 182)



Judging by principal responses, Ministry of Education regional staff worked most with decile 1–2 schools in 2015. Higher proportions of the principals of these schools than principals of higher-decile schools strongly agreed that Ministry of Education regional staff:

- worked constructively with them (45%)
- tackled wider issues for schools (40%)
- challenged them to improve student engagement (35%)
- challenged them to improve achievement (30%).

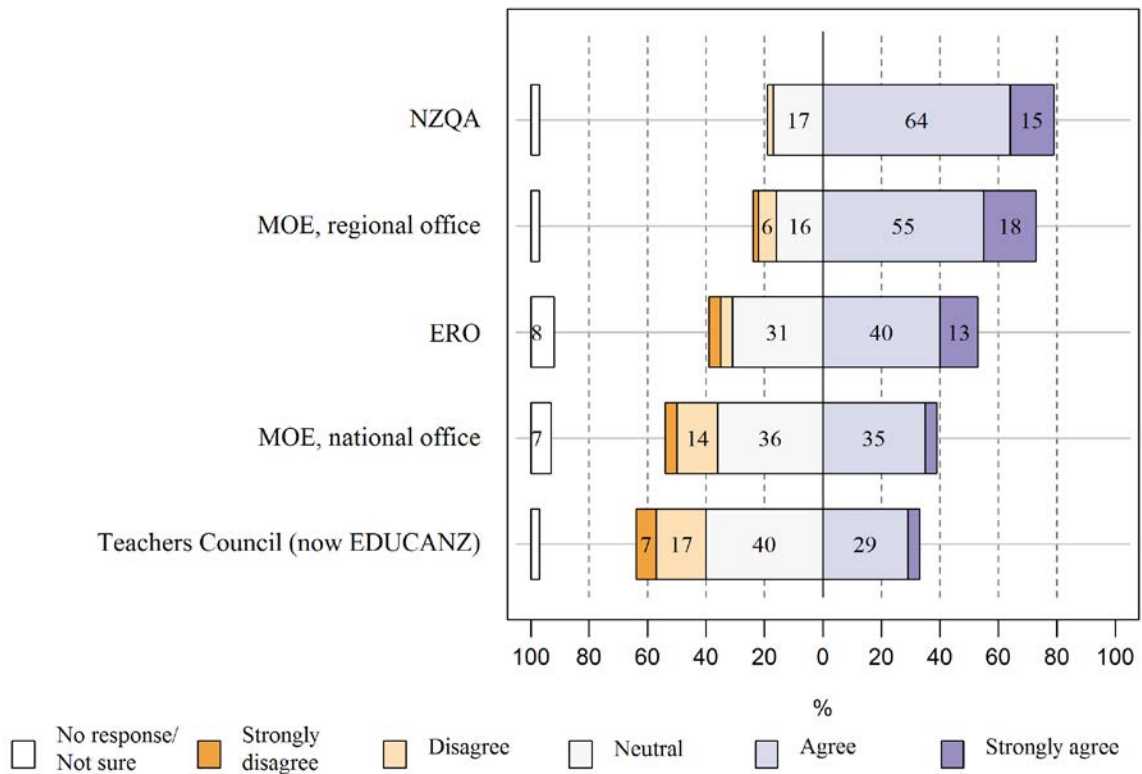
Principal views about their getting good support from the regional Ministry of Education staff and trusting them were unrelated to school decile.

## Views of advice

Secondary schools are complex organisations. They 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 and chart their own course. We asked principals how helpful they had found the advice they received from a range of government agencies and sector groups.

Figure 53 shows that most secondary principals found the advice they get from government agencies helpful, ranging from 79% finding NZQA advice helpful, to 33% finding the then EDUCANZ helpful.

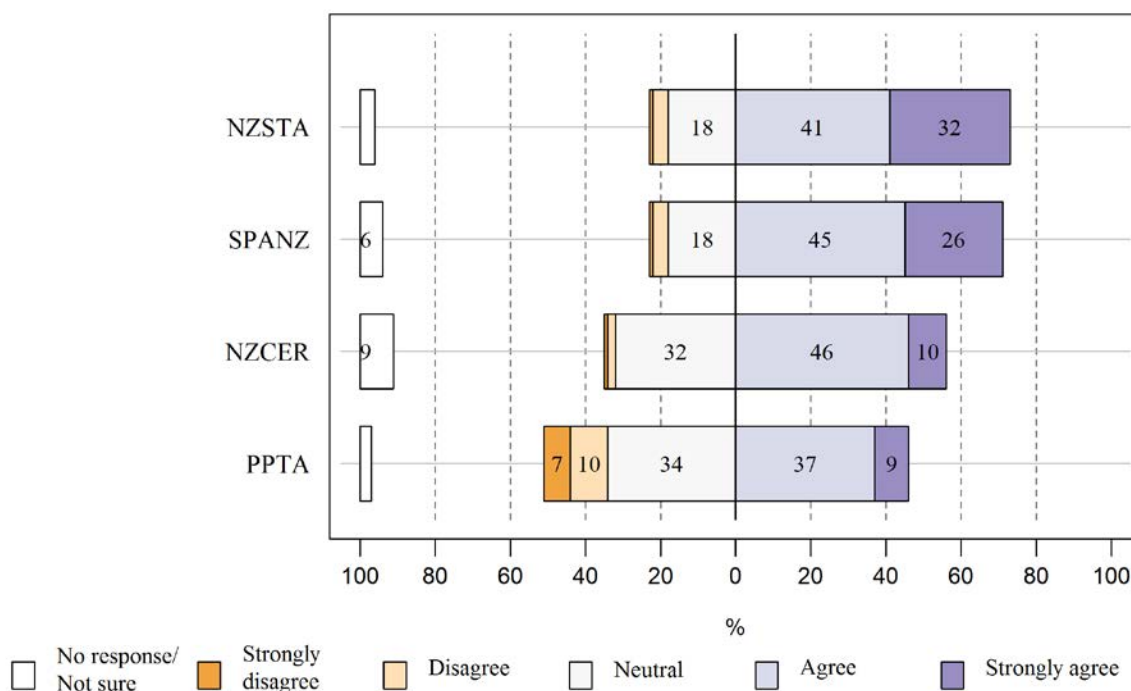
FIGURE 53 Principals' views of the helpfulness of the advice they get from government agencies (n = 182)



When it came to getting helpful advice from the agencies who work with schools to support individual students, the picture was somewhat less positive. The full picture is given in Figure 26, *Chapter 5: Supporting students' wellbeing*.

Principals were largely positive about NZSTA, which is contracted by the Government to support boards of trustees and their responsibilities, and is well used by principals. They were also largely positive about NZCER, whose statutory role includes providing research-based advice, and their own organisations, though 17% did not think they had had helpful advice from the PPTA. Figure 54 has the details.

FIGURE 54 Principals' views of helpfulness of advice from other organisations (n = 182)



More decile 1–2 school principals strongly agreed they got helpful advice from the Ministry of Education regional office (40%): this was the only decile-related difference in principal views of the helpfulness of the advice they got from government agencies and support bodies.

### Access to external expertise

Most secondary principals thought that they could access external expertise needed by their school. A minority could not access such advice and support for:

- working with students with mental health issues (36%)
- making the best choices on a tight budget (28%)
- reliable strategies for Māori and Pasifika student learning (20% each)
- embedding the NZC key competencies into all subject areas (20%)
- selecting effective external support for the school's professional learning and development (21%)
- implementing 21st century approaches to learning (17%).

There have been some notable improvements in school access to external expertise since 2012 in some areas:

- using data to improve teaching and learning (7% could not access this in 2015, compared with 27% in 2012)
- improving academic counselling for students (13% could not access this in 2015, compared with 26% in 2012)
- implementing 21st century approaches to learning (17% could not access this in 2015, compared with 31% in 2012)

- working with students with mental health issues (36% could not access this in 2015, compared with 51% in 2012)
- improving student behaviour (8% could not access this in 2015, compared with 19% in 2012).

Many decile 9–10 school principals said their school did not need external expertise to support them in improving school behaviour (50%, compared with 15% of decile 1–2 school principals), and fewer thought they needed external expertise to improve academic counselling for students (33%, compared with 0% of decile 1–2 school principals) or to implement 21st century approaches to learning (19%, compared with 5% of decile 1–2 school principals).

Higher proportions of decile 7–8 school principals could not access external expertise to improve academic counselling for students (29%), and higher proportions of decile 5–6 school principals could not access external expertise to help them select effective PLD (36%) or implement 21st century approaches to learning (34%).

### Summary and discussion

If we were evaluating the support and challenge given to schools by the government agencies and sector organisations in terms of the 3-tier status used by ERO, the material in this chapter suggests we would be looking somewhere in the broad category of a 3-year return. There were strengths in some areas, particularly in the focused work with ERO and NZQA, which gives schools both guidance and motivation to keep improving. Interactions with the regional Ministry of Education offices were largely positive by mid-2015, with signs that trust had largely been established, many experiencing good support, and just under half good challenge. The picture was more varied when it came to the Ministry of Education national office (responsible for funding and property as well as policy), and the then EDUCANZ. And it shifts into the negative when it comes to getting co-ordinated support for individual students with high needs from non-education agencies. It will be interesting to see when we return to secondary schools in 2018 if the recently announced restructure of CYF improves principals' perceptions here.

It is heartening to report that there have been some real gains since 2012 in secondary schools' access to needed external expertise. However, there are some areas that continue to present problems for substantial minorities of secondary schools, indicating needs that cannot be met by asking schools to source their own advice.