

School resources, relations with other schools, and support

Findings from the NZCER National Survey of Primary and Intermediate Schools 2016

Cathy Wylie

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Key findings

Only 8% of primary and intermediate principals found their school operational funding sufficient, and just under half the schools reduced their spending in 2016. Areas negatively impacted by the reduction in spending included spending in core student and curriculum areas. Two-thirds of principals did not find their government-funded staffing sufficient, an increase from 2010. This appears to reflect the increased expectations of schools and greater challenges arising over this period. Two-thirds were using their operational funding and locally raised funds to employ additional teaching staff.

Views of the insufficiency of funding went across the board, unrelated to school characteristics. Views of the insufficiency of staffing were unrelated to school decile.

Difficulty in finding suitable teachers had doubled since 2013, to 41% of all schools; 64% of decile 1–2 schools had such difficulty, compared with 31% of decile 9–10 schools. Twenty-seven percent of principals reported difficulty filling their senior or middle management roles. Only 38% of schools had no difficulty filling either their teacher or management roles with suitable people.

Student mobility and transience were often an issue for 17% of the schools, and sometimes for 43%. It was strongly related to school decile.

The 2016 national survey provides some baseline data to see how the new Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako policy changes the ways that schools work together more collaboratively. Competition between schools is seen as a particular challenge for the development and effectiveness of Kāhui Ako. Direct competition with other schools was reported by 61% of principals. This did not preclude them from working with other schools, though these are often not their direct competitors as they may be in a Kāhui Ako. Visits to other schools to learn from each other had doubled since 2013, to 76% of schools. Many principals were sharing and reflecting on their leadership practice with other principals. Schools were also sharing professional learning, although they were less likely to share challenges related to changing pedagogy or discuss their school achievement data, as the Kāhui Ako need to do. Almost all brought students together in sporting events, and to a lesser extent, cultural events.

Supporting student transitions between early childhood education (ECE) services and school was occurring at around two-thirds of the schools, but just over a third had children coming from too many ECE services to work with in this way. Most primary and intermediate schools passed on information about students' behaviour and National Standards to the next schooling level. Most worked closely with local schools to ensure a good transition for their students, particularly those with additional learning needs. Just over a quarter of the schools were sharing information with the next schooling level to support Māori language learning continuity, and over half involved whānau in planning for transitions.

Principals were generally confident that they had the expertise they needed, or could readily access it, to keep their school developing. Areas where they cannot access expertise they need are mainly related

to student need, and changes in the ways schools are doing things and expectations of them. The new approach to schools accessing professional learning and development (PLD) puts schools in the driving seat to identify the support they need once they have been allocated resources, so it is concerning that 28% needed and could not get effective external advice to select such support.

Few principals found the educational government agencies give unhelpful advice, and more reported positive than negative interaction with their regional Ministry of Education office, the government agency they can be in contact with. They were more critical of agencies geared to supporting their students. Many principals found ERO resources such as the national reports and new national evaluation indicators useful, and made use of their own ERO report. Just under half the principals thought that ERO review reports were a reliable indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in a school.

1.

Introduction

This report from NZCER's 2016 national survey of primary and intermediate schools focuses on how well principals thought their schools were resourced through operational funding and staffing, alongside how well we are distributing students between schools in a system that is still largely competitive between schools, whose resources are roll-based. Collaboration between schools is underpinning the introduction of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako: this report looks at how schools were supporting student transitions and how they worked together in 2016, a picture that can be used as part of the baseline to see what difference this major new policy makes in the years to come.¹ While our schools are self-managing, they rely on government agencies for more than resourcing: they also need good advice and information, and the report looks at what principals think of their government support, and the helpfulness of advice from their own sector organisations.

The 2016 NZCER national survey

The 2016 survey was conducted from August to early September. It was sent to a representative sample of 349 English-medium state and state-integrated primary and intermediate schools (20% of all these schools in New Zealand).² At these schools, surveys were sent to the principal and to a random sample of one in two teachers. Surveys also went to the board of trustees' chair, who was asked to give a second trustee survey to someone likely to have a different viewpoint from their own. Additionally, surveys were sent to a random sample of one in four parents at a cross-section of 36 schools.

NZCER has published a series of thematic reports from the 2016 national survey, covering student wellbeing and its support, school experiences with National Standards, early experiences and view of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, digital learning and its support, and the work of school boards. This report comes out alongside one on principals and their work, and one on student learning and teachers' work. Two more reports will follow, one on parental views of their child's schooling, and one on schools' provision for Māori students. You can access all the reports at www.nzcer.org.nz/research/national-survey

1 Information from the 2016 national survey on what principals, teachers, and trustees thought the Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako policy would change, and how it was working in its early days is given in a separate report: Wylie, C. (2016). *Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako: The Emergent Stage*. Wellington: NZCER. Available at www.nzcer.org.nz/system/files/NZCER%20COL%20Report%20final.pdf

2 Further details about the sample, response rates, school and respondents' characteristics are available in a separate report: Berg, M. (2017). *NZCER national survey of primary and intermediate schools 2016: Methodology and sample information*. Wellington: NZCER. Available at www.nzcer.org.nz/national-survey

About this report

This report uses information from the principals. The response rate for principals was 57% ($n = 200$). Survey returns for principals were generally representative of schools in the sample, with a slight over-representation of large schools, and urban schools. Decile 8–10 schools were somewhat over-represented, as were schools in the Auckland region. The maximum margin of error for the principal survey is 6.9%. Sometimes I report results for smaller groups of respondents within each survey; the maximum margin of error reported for each survey does not apply to these groups.

In Section 2 I look at what primary and intermediate school principals report about their school's financial health, rolls, and student mobility, and staffing, which are all key aspects of the resourcing schools have to meet student need. Section 3 focuses on the extent of competition between schools, and the experiences schools have of supporting each other before many move into working in Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, which are aimed at overcoming the barrier to mutual sharing and development that comes with endemic competition between schools. Section 4 covers principal views of the systemic support they have from government agencies, what they gain from the work of ERO, and how they view ERO reports and processes, and what they gain from sector organisations. The final section draws these different threads together to consider the overall picture from principals of whether schools have the resourcing and support they need to meet the increasing expectations we have of schools.

2.

Funding, rolls, and staffing

New Zealand's schools receive roll-based funding to cover their operational expenses, and roll-based staffing where the government pays actual teaching and school leadership salary costs. The government announced a fundamental review of school funding in 2016, building on sector concern that the deciles in which schools are categorised to provide some additional funding in relation to the socioeconomic profile of their school community were being misread as indicators of school quality, and affecting school choice. The sector has also voiced concern about the underfunding of education. The review of funding is complex, and continues. The information from this survey is relevant to that review, and also to other policy that impacts on school resourcing.

Funding

Operational funding has long been an issue for schools. It is one of the top three issues facing their school identified by both school trustees and principals. Only 8% of primary and intermediate principals thought that the 2016 government funding for their school was enough to meet its needs, and a further 6% were unsure. This is much the same picture as in 2013 and 2010.

Only 12% of principals said the current year looked better in financial terms than the year before, a marked decrease on the 33% who indicated this in 2013. Roll increase was the main reason for improvements in school finances (78% of those whose school finances looked better), followed by an increase in locally raised funds (39% of this group), spending reductions (35%), increases in the payment levels of school donations or fees (13%), and more international fee-paying students (9%).

In 2016, more principals said that things were looking much the same in financial terms as the year before (52%, compared with 30% who indicated this in 2013). Thirty-four percent said the current year looked worse financially, much the same as in 2013. Rising fixed costs (62% of this group) and an increase in students with additional learning needs (60%) were the main reasons for finances looking worse in the current year compared to the previous year. Roll decreases (37% of this group), a drop in locally raised funds (27%), a drop in the payment levels of school donations or fees (25%), a one-off large project (18%), and fewer international students (3%) were other reasons for 2016 looking worse financially for schools than 2015.

Just under half the schools (48%) had reduced their overall spending in 2016. The areas negatively affected were:

- support staff hours (26% of the principals responding to the survey reported this)
- curriculum area(s) (25%)
- provision of digital technologies for teaching and learning (23%)
- co-curricular experiences, such as sport, camps, cultural activities (23%)
- inclusion of students with additional learning needs (11%)
- programmes like Reading Recovery (10%).

Other areas negatively affected by a reduction in spending included PLD and property maintenance. Additionally, some principals were increasing their hours of regular teaching, or starting regular teaching. Fewer large³ schools had reduced their spending in 2016 (29%).

How full are our schools?

Changes in school rolls are one of the factors that most affect a school's financial health. It is easier to manage school finances if the roll is stable, or steadily growing. We asked principals whether they had places for all who applied to come, and then looked at patterns related to whether schools had enrolment zones in place, as schools are required to do if they are operating at their physical capacity.

Two-thirds of the schools had places for all the students who applied. Twenty-six percent were over-subscribed, and 7% could not take students who applied during the school year. This is much the same picture as in 2013 and 2010.

School decile features here, with only 6% of decile 1–2 schools unable to take all the students who applied to attend, increasing to 43% of the decile 9–10 schools.⁴ There is a similar trend with the related characteristic of school size. Only 9% of small schools could not take all those who applied to attend, increasing to 51% of large schools.⁵ Not surprisingly, student mobility or transience was less of an issue for the schools that could not take all the students who applied to attend them.

Yet 38% of the principals ($n = 76$) said their school had an enrolment scheme—more than seemed to need them. Half of these schools had room for all the students who applied to them. A further 7% of schools were thinking of having an enrolment scheme. These were least common in decile 1–2 schools (17%) and most common in decile 9–10 schools (55%).⁶ Sixteen percent of small schools had enrolment schemes, increasing to 80% of large schools.⁷

Figure 1 shows that close to a quarter of schools with enrolment schemes took less than 5% of students from beyond their zone. However, 18% of those with enrolment schemes were taking 41% or more of their students from beyond their zone.

3 We define large schools as having 351 students or more, medium–large schools having from 201–350 students, small–medium schools as having 101–200 students, and small schools as having 100 or fewer students.

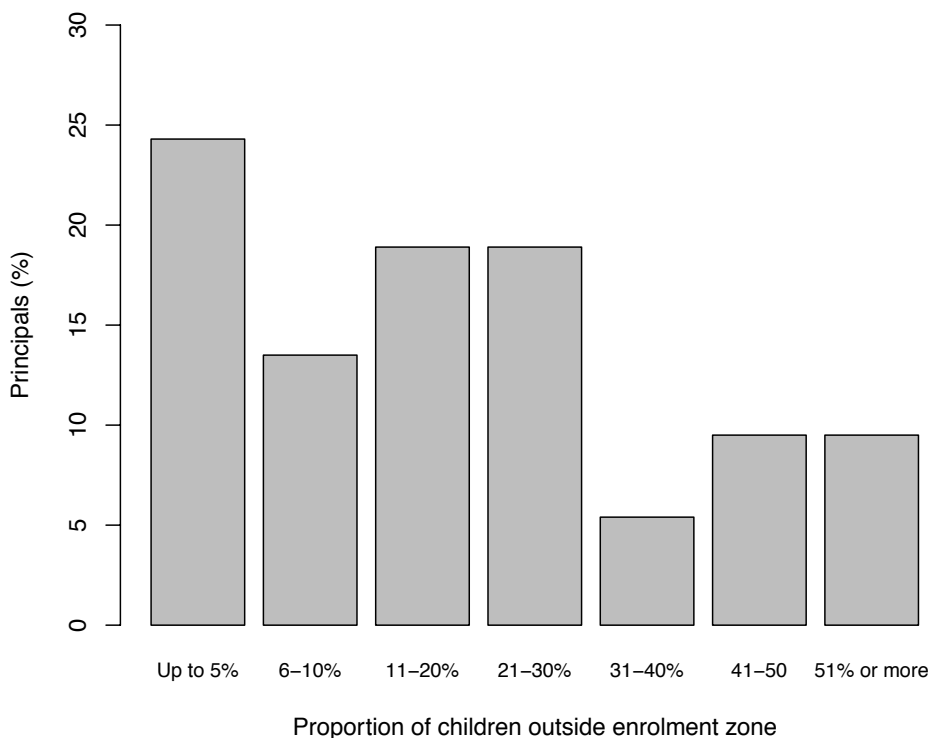
4 Twenty percent of decile 3–4 schools could not take all students who applied, 14% of decile 5–6 schools, and 35% of decile 7–8 schools.

5 Seventeen percent of small–medium schools could not take all students who applied, and 27% of medium–large schools.

6 Twenty-nine percent of decile 3–4 and decile 5–6 schools had an enrolment zone, as did 51% of decile 7–8 schools.

7 Twenty-one percent of small–medium schools and 36% of medium–large schools had an enrolment zone.

FIGURE 1: Schools with enrolment zones (n = 76): Proportion of students taken from out of zone

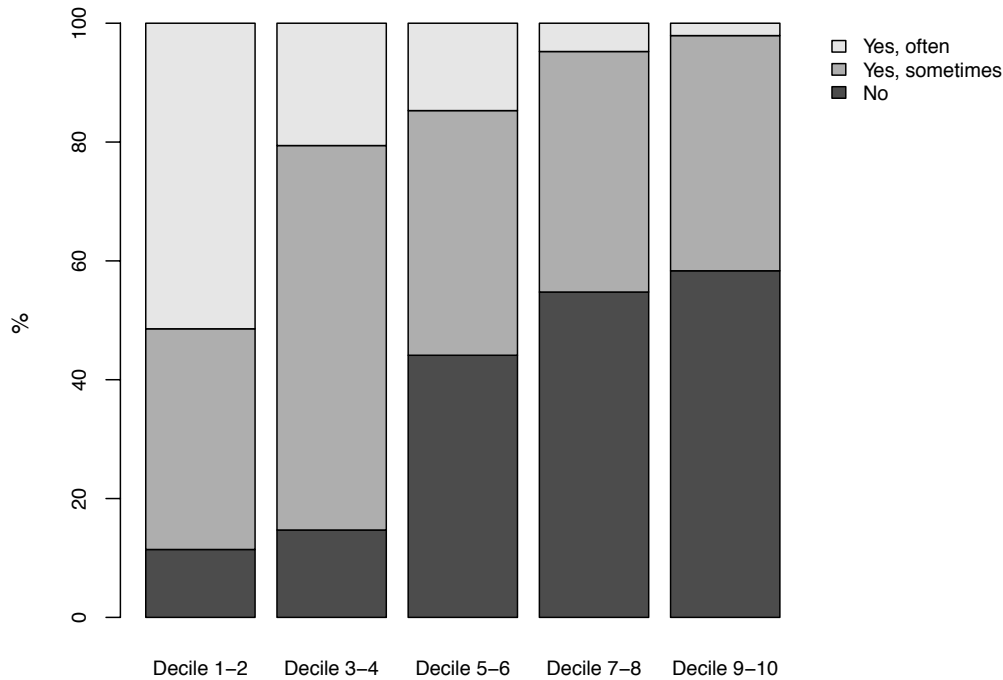


Student mobility and transience

Movement of students between schools within the school year impacts directly and indirectly on the management of a school's resources. Fifty-nine percent of the principals said that student mobility and transience posed issues for their school. Transience was 'often' an issue for 17%, and 'sometimes' for 43%, much the same as in 2013.

The extent to which it is an issue for a school is strongly related to school decile, as Figure 2 shows. Decile 1-2 schools are most affected, with decile 3-4 schools most likely to report that student mobility and transience are 'sometimes' rather than 'often' an issue.

FIGURE 2: Student mobility as an issue—differences related to school decile (n = 200)



We asked principals to describe the mobility and transience-related issues experienced by their school. Twenty-two percent of those who said their school had issues with transience specifically mentioned difficulty managing resources and staff.

Set up support programmes, employment of staff involved, then children disappear to somewhere else. Lots of effort put into these children, then they move. Lately this has been largely because of families being unable to afford to live in the area.

Unpredictability of staffing and resourcing students with learning and behavioural needs because of transience among these families.

Programmes to assist these students are abandoned. If we've employed staff with operational funding and ministry funding, we may have to return money to the ministry, but the board has to fulfil its employment obligations to staff.

Numbers of students transitioning in and out takes time and resources that are already stretched.

Issues that affected mobile and transient children relating to their family's housing situation, employment, or wellbeing were described by 28% of those who said their school had issues with transience.

Housing issues are creating transience. We have situations where more than one family is living in a house, this becomes untenable and one of the families then moves on to another area. Families sometimes gain state housing in another area which means that they move out. We experience issues of poverty in our school and that presents issues such as transport to school etc.

'Gypsy' Day always means changes as dairy worker contracts change. An increasing transience rate changes class dynamics and adds issues to data tracking. Also, over recent years many move out here from the city for perceived savings (rent), but living costs are not much cheaper due to travel and isolation, so they move again.

They shift between family for periods of time (from weeks to months) while primary carers are experiencing some difficulty (e.g., health or employment issues).

Poor attendance, behaviour, or learning among highly mobile students was mentioned by 24%.

Some children have already had 2–3 different schools before they come to us, they stay a term, then go again. Difficult for them to achieve, make friends, feel a part of the community.

Some students move constantly between homes and have attendance problems.

Little attachment to learning, people, expectation. Poor attendance, poor behaviours, little idea of engagement. Poor self-esteem. Poor sense of responsibility. Lack of academic achievement—many gaps in learning.

Fourteen percent of this group also observed that it was hard to ensure continuity—let alone acceleration—in mobile students' learning.

We have some children who have had multiple transitions/schools. It is difficult to target their needs in a timely manner before they are moving on again.

At risk students keep moving therefore difficult for them to experience the benefits of academic and/or emotional/social intervention programmes.

Transience is between 40 and 50% most years. A lot of effort goes into settling, testing, teaching etc. of children new to the school and all of this effort goes when the children leave and we start all over again. National Standards are quite meaningless with so many different children. Children are often unsettled or have missed a lot of schooling as a result of transience. Probably the number 1 inhibitor to accelerated learning.

Staffing

Government-funded staffing for schools is based on student numbers. Almost two-thirds (64%) of principals did not think their school's teaching staffing entitlement was enough to meet its needs in 2016. This view has not changed since 2013, and is less sanguine than 2010, when 51% thought their staffing was inadequate. This suggests that the expectations of schools have increased over the last 6 years, which is consistent with the greater government emphasis on student achievement, using the National Standards, and a stronger focus on increasing the achievement of students from the 'priority' groups: Māori, Pasifika, students with additional learning needs, and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. There is also greater emphasis on digital learning, on partnerships with parents around their child's learning, and on strengthening partnership with the school's community, all of which ask more of a school's staffing resource.

Principals of medium–large schools were most likely to find their school's teaching staffing entitlement insufficient (84%).

Two-thirds of the schools were also employing teaching staff above their entitlement, using their operational and locally raised funding. This is much the same as in 2013. The main roles of these additional teachers were to: teach classes (58% of schools employing them), indicating decisions to reduce class sizes; for literacy or numeracy support (43%); and to support students with additional learning needs (32%). Other roles were to provide music, arts, or kapa haka tuition (17%), te reo Māori support (15%), relieve the principal (14%), support English language learners (13%), support extension or gifted and talented students (9%), provide technical support with digital technologies (7%), and home–school partnerships (4%). A few mentioned also employing additional teachers to provide Reading Recovery, release for senior leaders, and curriculum areas such as science and languages, or support for Pasifika students.

School characteristics were unrelated to these uses of additional teachers, with some exceptions. Small schools were most likely to use their operational and locally raised funds to employ principal relief (43% did so, making up most of these). Decile 9–10 schools made up almost half the schools employing music, arts, or kapa haka teachers.

Forty-one percent of the principals had general difficulty finding suitable teachers for their school's vacancies: double the 18% who had general difficulty in 2013, or the 20% in 2010. This is decile-related: 64% of decile 1–2 principals had general difficulty finding suitable teachers, decreasing to 40% of those leading decile 5–6 schools, and 31% of those leading decile 9–10 schools.

Finding suitable teachers for students with additional learning needs was a difficulty for 11% of the schools, particularly for decile 1–2 schools (25%). Nine percent had difficulty finding teachers to provide Reading Recovery, with small schools over-represented here (18%).

Te reo Māori was also an area presenting some staffing difficulties: 10% in relation to teaching te reo Māori at a basic level (taught as a separate subject), and 4% each at a moderate and high level. Decile 1–2 schools had the most difficulty finding te reo Māori teachers who could cater for students at a moderate level (14%), and only decile 1–2 and decile 3–4 schools had difficulty finding teachers to cater for students learning at a high level in te reo Māori (11% each).

Senior or middle management roles were difficult to fill with suitable teachers for 27% of the principals. The main reasons given were a shortage of good quality applicants (55% of this group), followed by a too demanding workload (42%), too much paperwork/administration (40%), and not enough money for the responsibility (38%). Also mentioned as reasons for difficulty in filling these key school roles with suitable teachers were that the pay was not enough for the additional work hours (30%), that there were not enough experienced teachers among the school's staff (26%), housing costs in the area (19%), nature of the school community (17%), the school not being able to offer management units (additional pay; 15%, only small or small–medium schools), and a shortage of curriculum expertise (11%).

Only 38% of the principals had no difficulty finding suitable teachers generally, as well as filling their senior and middle management roles.

Relations with other schools

Our system of self-managed schools, with resources based on student roll numbers, has increased competition between schools.⁸ The new Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako policy aims to overcome this competition by drawing schools in an area together, taking responsibility for all the students in that area, with more attention to the student journey over learning levels. This section charts the extent of competition among primary and intermediate schools, and the extent of the kinds of sharing and working together that they are used to, including how student transitions from early childhood to primary school—and primary school or intermediate to secondary—were being supported.

Direct competition with other schools for students was reported by 63% of the principals, much the same as in 2013. This was unrelated to school decile. Principals of schools that had places for all the students who applied to come were more aware of competing with other schools (70%, compared with 49% of those who could not take all the students who applied).

The median number of direct competitors was three, with a range from competing with one other school, to 12.

⁸ Wylie, C. (2012). *Vital Connections: why we need more than self-managing schools*. Wellington: NZCER Press.

When we asked about student mobility, some principals commented that the loss of a small number of students can make a big difference to staffing in a small school, relating their experiences when neighbouring schools had attracted their students to shift schools through the provision of a bus service, or curriculum areas the school could not afford itself.

Competition between schools does not mean that schools do not do things with other schools, though they choose which schools they do them with. There was no association between principals' view that they were directly competing with other schools and what they did with other schools.

In previous surveys we asked more about formal clusters and networks, but with the advent of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, we thought it useful to provide a picture of wider activity. Table 1 shows that in 2016 student events were commonly shared—sporting more than cultural— and that there was also sharing of practice and PLD. Visiting other schools had almost doubled since 2013. Sharing that needs trust, such as pedagogical challenges and approaches to getting change, and discussion of student achievement data, was less common. Only half of the schools shared individual student National Standards data if the student shifted to another school.

TABLE 1 Schools' joint work: 2013 and 2016

Schools' joint work	2013 (n = 172) %	2016 (n = 200) %
Share sporting events	*	98
Share and reflect on leadership practice at the principal level	*	80
Share cultural events	*	79
Visit other schools to learn from each other	43	76
Share PLD	72	73
Share individual student National Standards performance data if they move to another school	*	51
Share challenges and approaches around getting change in pedagogy	*	49
Discuss our school achievement data	*	41
Moderate National Standards OTJs	*	35
Have regular meetings of schools as a group with social agencies	29	25
Work together to place students who are having difficulty in one school into another school	14	23
Discuss our student engagement data	*	20
Work with other local schools to reduce truancy	9	17

* Not asked.

Some specific examples of sharing were also mentioned: a cluster of schools had training three times a year for the schools' teacher aides; another had an Assistant Principal/Deputy Principal network, and a programme for provisionally registered teachers; PB4L (positive behaviour for learning) clusters were mentioned, and First-time Principals and their mentors coming together to share school systems and

experiences. One school employed someone in a mana Pasifika role who they lent to support other schools, along with other resources focused on student wellbeing. Interschool competitions such as a maths quiz were also mentioned.

School decile was associated with only two kinds of joint work, reflecting the much greater needs of communities served by decile 1–2 schools. Decile 1–2 schools were most likely to have meetings together with social agencies (56%, decreasing to 10% of decile 9–10 schools),⁹ and work with other schools to reduce truancy (36%, decreasing to 4% of decile 9–10 schools).¹⁰ Moderating National Standards overall teacher judgements (OTJs) was least likely in schools located in secondary urban locations, with populations between 10,000 and 29,999 (7%). Rural schools were least likely to join other schools to meet social agencies (10%).

Transitions

The Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako policy puts students and their learning journey across year levels and educational institutions at the heart. Sharing of information about individual students and their strengths and needs across institutions, and thinking about the coherence of that journey (aligning curriculum, for example, so that students do not repeat what they have already mastered or fully explored) have come to the fore. Here I look at schools' practice in 2016, which can act as a baseline to chart changes over the years to come.

Transitions from early childhood education services

Some primary schools' new entrants come from just a few local ECE services; other schools find their new entrants coming from more than 20 different services. Figure 3 shows that around two-thirds of the principals reported working closely with local ECE services to ensure a good transition of children, particularly those with additional learning needs. However, just over a third of the principals thought that their children came from so many ECE services that they were unable to work with each service to ensure good transitions for all children.

Just over half could offer te reo Māori to tamariki transitioning from ECEs; though only some of these at a high immersion level. Over half of the schools did not seem to have local Kōhanga Reo. Only around a third of the principals who answered the item about Kōhanga Reo worked closely with them to ensure a good transition for tamariki. Most of the schools did not have local Pasifika language nests. Of those that did, only 24% of the schools worked closely with them to ensure a good transition from ECE.

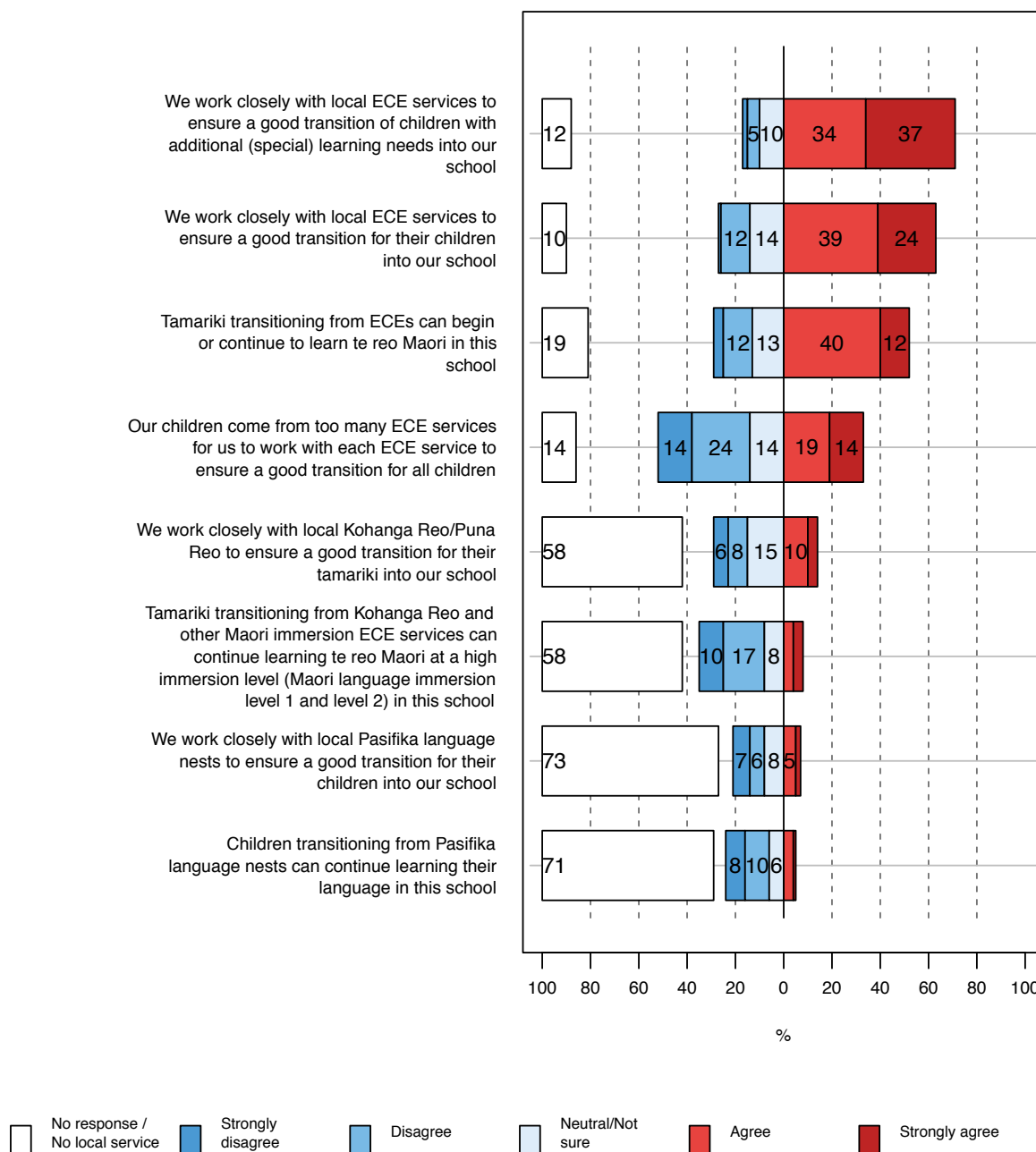
Transitions to intermediate or secondary school

Almost 90% of the principals reported that they passed on data about students' behaviour to their next local school, and 82%, their National Standards data. Most worked closely with local intermediate or secondary schools to ensure a good transition for students with additional learning needs, and 69%, for all their students making the transition.

⁹ Thirty-four percent of decile 3–4 schools joined others to meet with social agencies, 20% of decile 5–6 schools, and 12% of decile 7–8 schools.

¹⁰ Seventeen percent of decile 3–4 schools worked with others to reduce truancy, 23% of decile 5–6 schools, and 12% of decile 7–8 schools.

FIGURE 3: Transition from ECE to primary school (n = 191)



Transitions and school provision supporting te reo Māori

Over half the principals of schools with rumaki/bilingual units or classes said they worked closely with local intermediate or secondary schools to ensure their tamariki made a good transition to the next schooling level. Slightly fewer said they did this for tamariki who were learning te reo Māori as a subject. Fewer still worked with wharekura to ensure a good transition, perhaps indicating that their students were more likely to continue on in English-medium schools.

Figure 5 below shows that generally 28% of principals said they shared information with other schools to support Māori language learning continuity, and close to this also shared practices to support this. Over half reported that they involved whānau in planning for transitions.

FIGURE 4: Transition to intermediate or secondary school—what schools share (n = 200)

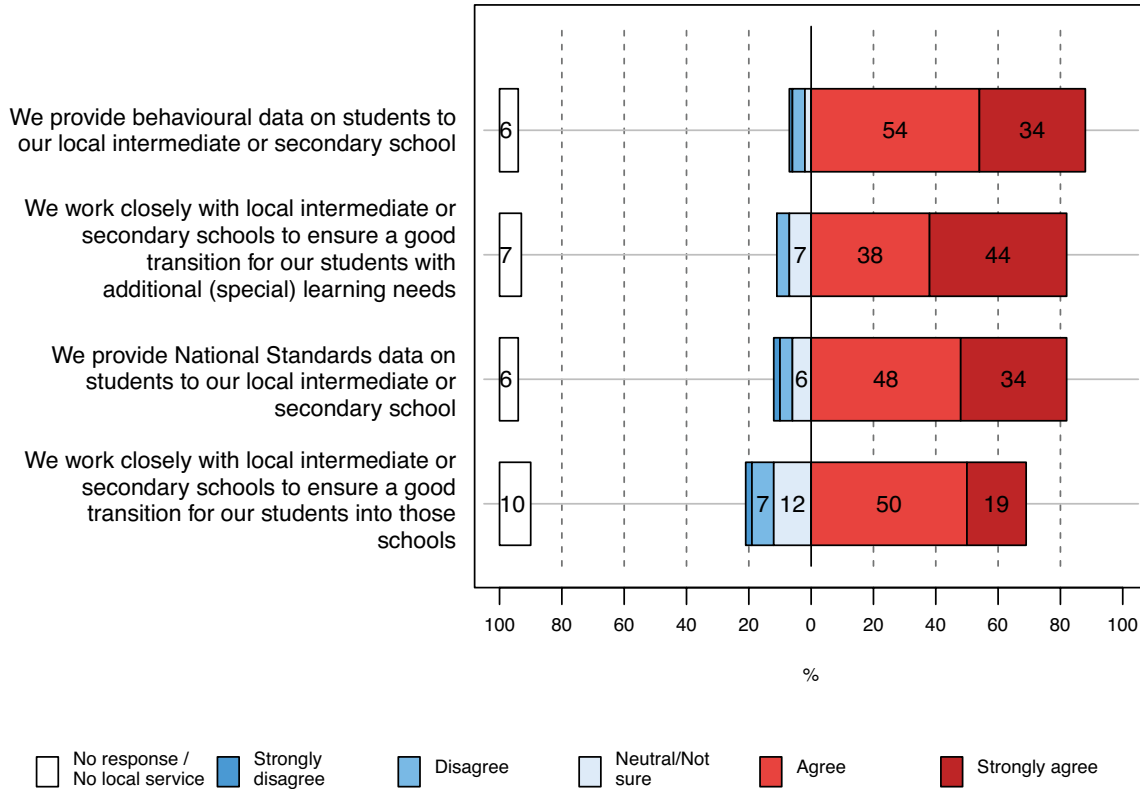
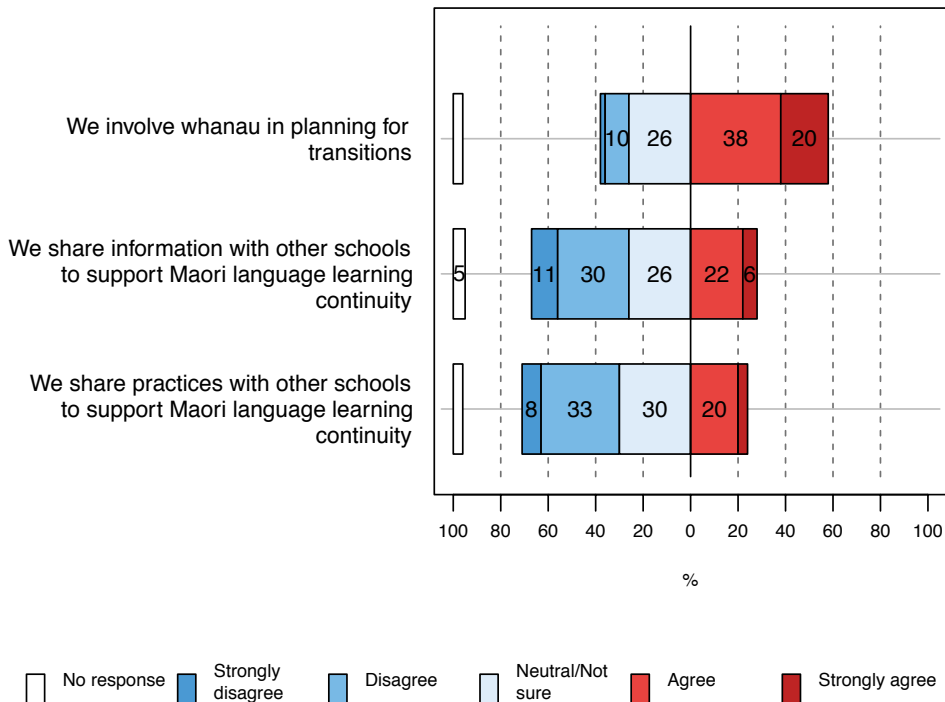


FIGURE 5: Te reo Māori support in transitions (n = 200)



3.

Support for schools

Many New Zealand principals relish the autonomy they have to make decisions at the school level. To make good decisions, they need good advice and support—and challenge—from the Ministry of Education and other government agencies concerned with education or student support. They also need access to knowledge and expertise they may not have themselves, and to keep open “the horizon of possibility”¹¹

External expertise

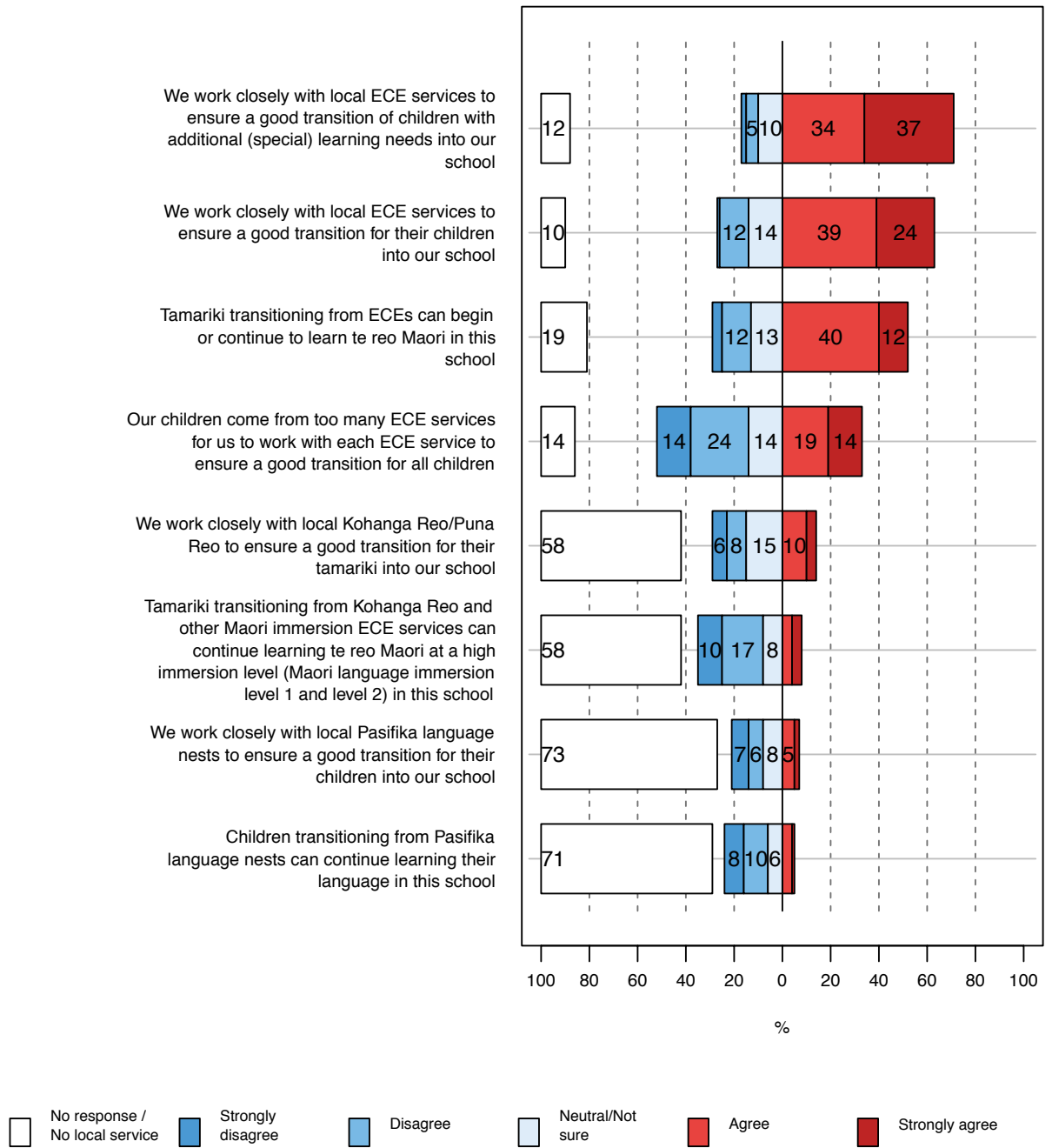
Figure 6 below covers some key aspects of school responsibilities, including some of the more prominent policy emphases of recent years. The 2016 national survey took place before a major change to government-funded PLD, which shifted from a set of contracts between the Ministry of Education and consortia of providers, to schools or Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako making applications to a regional panel of Ministry of Education and principals, resulting—if successful—in an allocation of hours which the school or Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako then offers to an accredited individual from a national panel. The information below includes some information that will be relevant to track what difference this new approach makes.

We asked principals whether they had the external expertise they needed to keep their school developing across 16 aspects of school responsibilities, and whether, if they did need it, they could access it. On the whole, primary and intermediate principals were confident that they have the expertise they need, or could access it. Where they felt they needed external expertise but could not access it was mainly related to students with mental health issues, and strategies to support the learning of students who are among the government’s priority learners: Māori, Pasifika, and students with additional learning needs. Also notable, given the major change in Ministry of Education-funded PLD provision, is the 28% who thought they could not access the external expertise they needed to select effective external advice or support for their school’s professional learning. This indicates that the new shift may not be straightforward, or ensure a good match of school need and external expertise.

The other key areas where principals thought they could not access the external expertise they needed were related to changes in how schools are doing things, with greater emphasis on working with parents, whānau, and Pasifika fanau as partners in their children’s learning, and on learning with digital technology.

¹¹ Stoll, L., Halbert, J., & Kaser, L. (2012). Deepening learning in school-to-school networks. In C. Day (Ed.), *International handbook on teacher and school development* (pp. 493–512). London, UK: Routledge.

FIGURE 6: Access to external expertise, reported by principals (n = 200)



School characteristics showed some associations here. Principals of large schools were the most confident that they did not need external expertise related to using teacher inquiry to improve learning (53%), learning with digital technologies (41%), or selecting effective external advice/support for the school’s professional learning (31%).

Principals of schools in secondary urban areas were most likely to identify unmet needs for external expertise with improving student behaviour (36%), and working with students with mental health issues (50%). Minor urban school principals were most likely to identify unmet needs for external expertise in

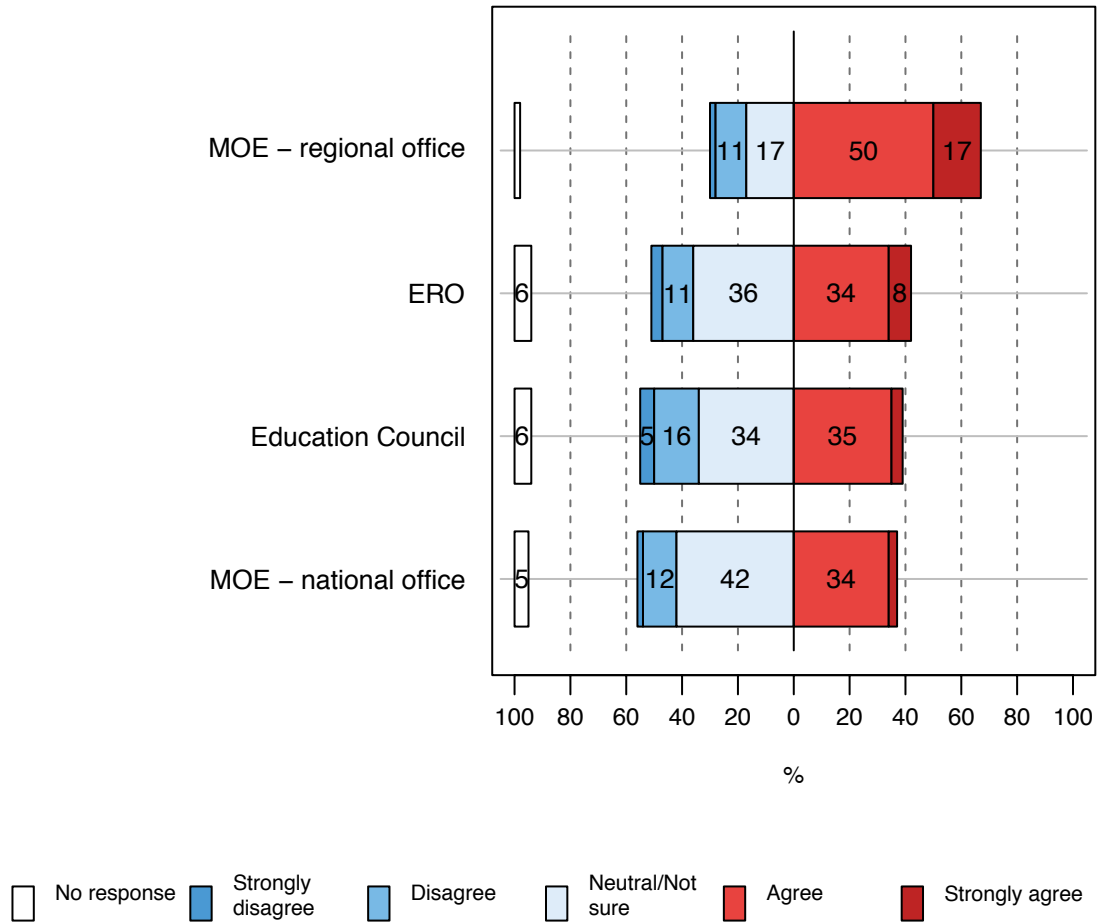
engaging with parents, whānau, and Pasifika fanau (45%), and principals of rural and secondary urban schools, making the best choices on a tight budget (31% and 43% respectively).

Principals of large schools and decile 5–6 schools were the ones most likely to identify unmet need for external expertise to help them implement reliable strategies to improve Pasifika student learning (41% and 37% respectively). Principals of small schools were most likely to identify unmet need for external expertise to help them make the best choices on a tight budget (32%), and selecting effective external advice/support for the school's professional learning (42%).

Interaction with education agencies

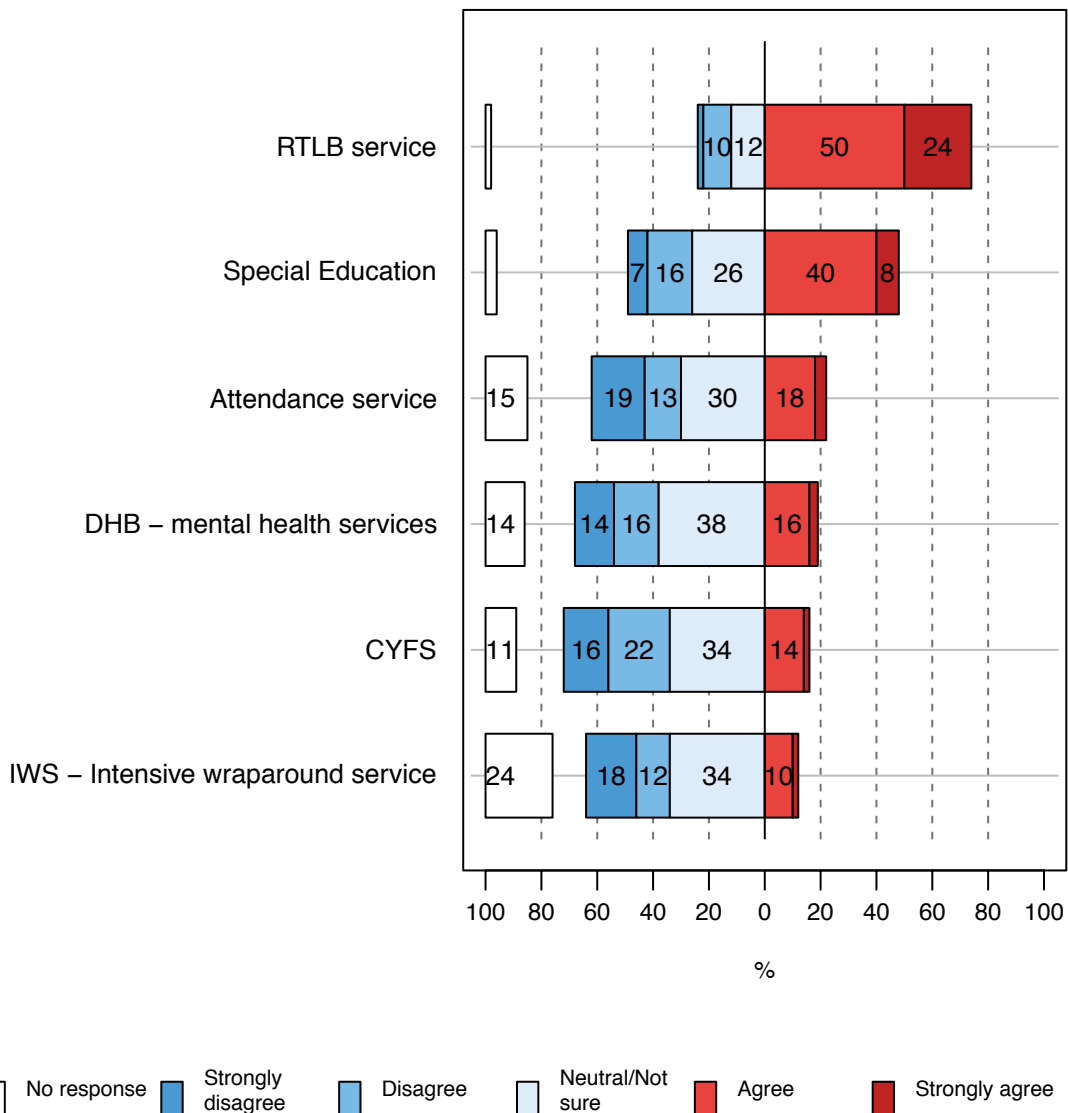
In 2016, primary and intermediate principals found the advice they received from the regional Ministry of Education office was the most helpful to them of the government agencies we asked about. Quite a few principals were neutral or not sure about the helpfulness of advice, perhaps because they had not sought it from a given agency, had mixed experiences, or were waiting to see how it worked in practice. Relatively few found advice from these agencies unhelpful. School characteristics were unrelated to views of the helpfulness of advice from government educational agencies.

FIGURE 7: Principals' agreement that they had helpful advice from government educational agencies (n = 200)



Principals were more critical of the advice they had from agencies geared to supporting their students, with the exception of their Resource Teacher: Learning and Behaviour (RTL) service, which works more closely with schools and are employed within clusters of schools, and to a lesser extent, the Ministry of Education's Special Education staff. Large schools were less positive than others about their RTL service (26% disagreed that its advice was helpful). Otherwise, principals' views of the helpfulness of advice from these sources were unrelated to school characteristics.

FIGURE 8: Principals’ agreement that they had helpful advice from government-funded organisations, about individual students’ wellbeing, behaviour, and learning (n = 200)

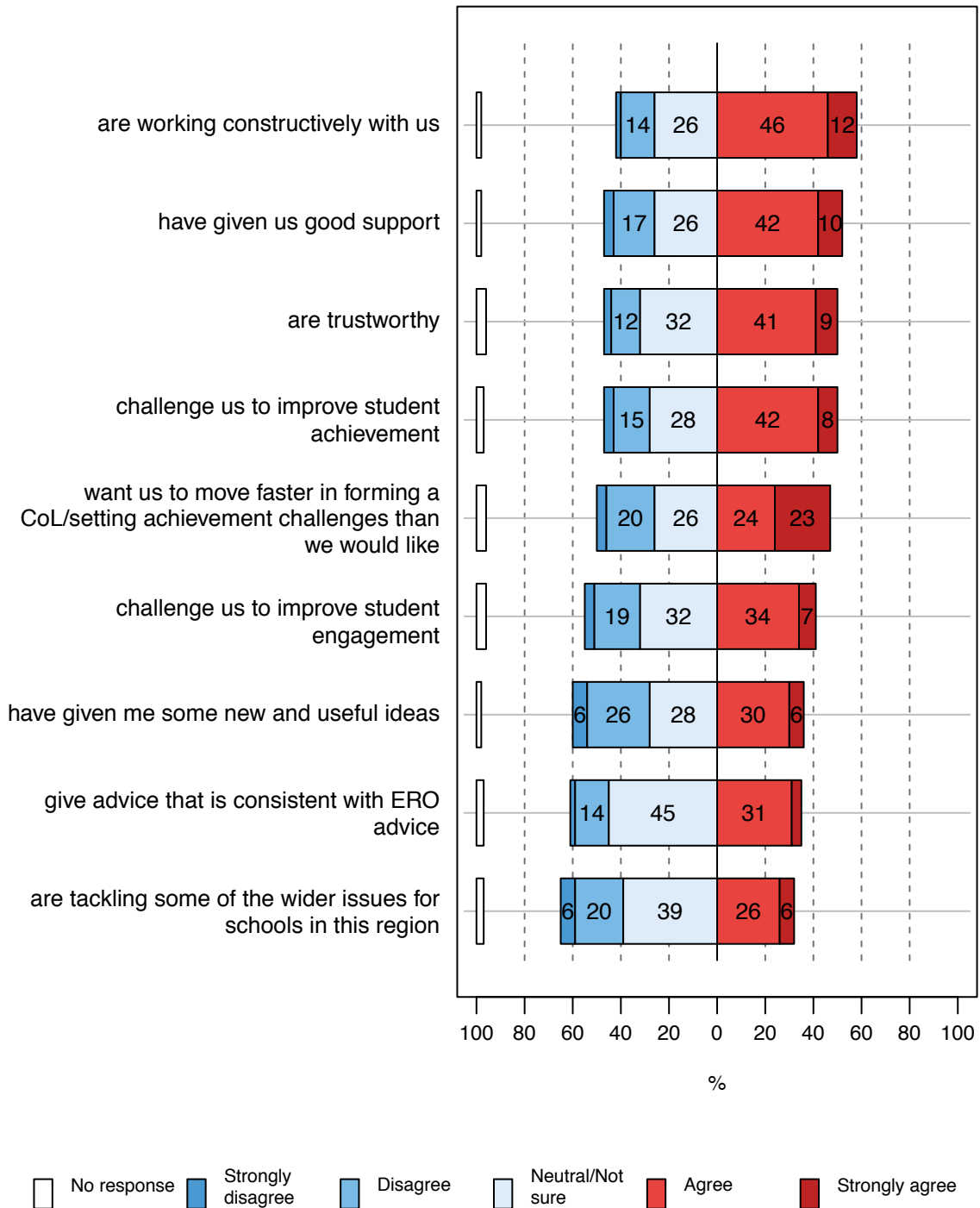


Interaction with regional Ministry of Education

Schools’ interaction with the Ministry of Education is closest at the regional level. On the whole, more principals report positive interaction than negative, with quite a few unsure or neutral, perhaps indicating little interaction. Over half the principals thought their regional Ministry of Education office worked constructively with them, and had given them good support. Half the principals found them trustworthy. Close to half thought their regional office was wanting them to move faster in forming a Community of Learning | Kāhui Ako or setting its achievement challenges than they would like; half felt challenged to improve student achievement, and slightly less (41%), to improve student engagement in their learning. Views were more evenly divided about whether their Ministry of Education regional office had given principals new and useful ideas (36% thought so, 32% thought not), and if it was tackling some of the wider issues for schools in the region (32% thought so, and 26% thought not). Views were unrelated to school characteristics.

FIGURE 9: Principals' views of the Ministry of Education at the regional level (n = 200)

Ministry of Education regional staff:



Experiences of the Education Review Office

ERO is responsible for evaluating the quality of education in educational services, and for supporting improvement in those services. Our 2016 national survey questions asked about principals' experiences of their own school reviews, and also about their use of the national reports and new improvement framework, the school evaluation indicators, that had been available in draft form before it was finalised in July 2016.

Almost a quarter of the principals (24%) reported a 4–5-year review return as a result of their most recent ERO review, 70% a 3-year review return, and 6%, a 1–2-year review return. A similar range was reported for their previous ERO review.¹² However, schools do shift their review return time, particularly those on the 1–2-year review return, and to a lesser extent, those on the 4–5-year review return time, indicating the importance of regular review—and ongoing support for schools.

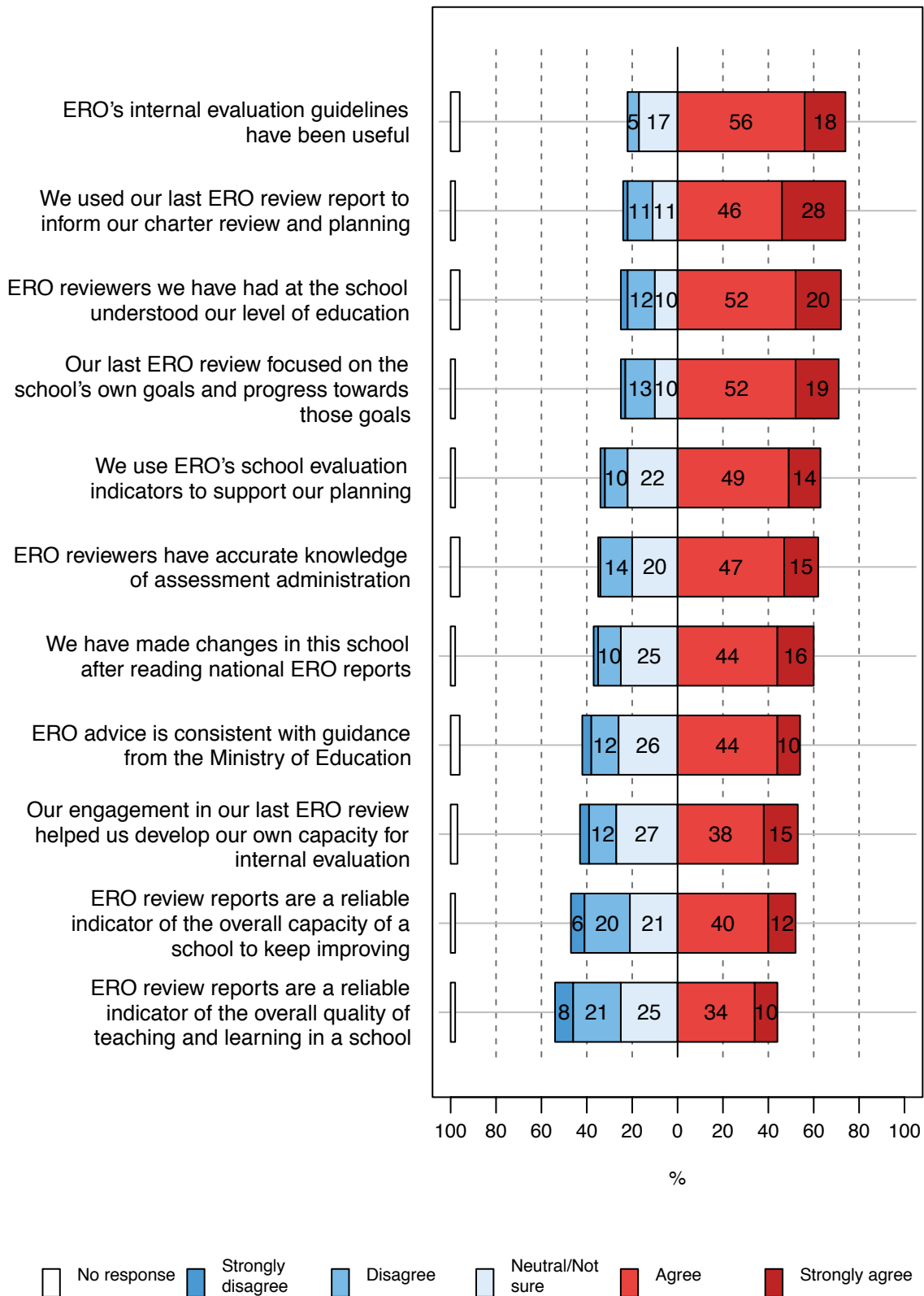
- 87% of the schools that had previously had a 1–2-year review return now had a 3-year review return.
- 17% percent of those that had previously had a 3-year review return time now had a 4–5-year review return.
- 32% of those that had previously had a 4–5-year review return now had a 3-year review return.
- 5% of those that had previously had a 4–5-year review return now had a 1–2-year review return.
- 5% of those that had previously had a 3-year review return now had a 1–2-year review return.

This report has shown that decile 1–2 schools face more issues, and so it is not surprising that 17% were in the 1–2-year review return category. Schools in minor urban areas (towns with 1,000 to 9,999 people) also had a higher proportion than schools in other areas in the 1–2-year review return category (18%). School size was associated with ERO review return of 4–5 years, ranging from 9% of small schools to 43% of large schools.

Many principals were positive about the usefulness to them of ERO work, particularly the new internal evaluation guidelines and indicators, and national ERO reports, that have increasingly included examples of good practice. Just over half indicated that their engagement in their last ERO review had helped develop their own capacity for internal evaluation. There is still a range of views about how reliable ERO review reports are, with 44% of principals thinking they provided a reliable indicator of the overall quality of teaching and learning in a school, much the same as in 2013, and 52% thinking that they were a reliable indicator of the overall capacity of a school to keep improving.

¹² ERO's national figures for primary and intermediate schools in late December 2016 show 21% in the 4–5-year review return category, 71% in the 3-year review return category, and 7% in the 1–2-year review return category. There is a slight over-representation of schools in the 4–5-year review return category in the 2016 national survey responses.

FIGURE 10: Principals' views of ERO (n = 200)



3. Support for schools

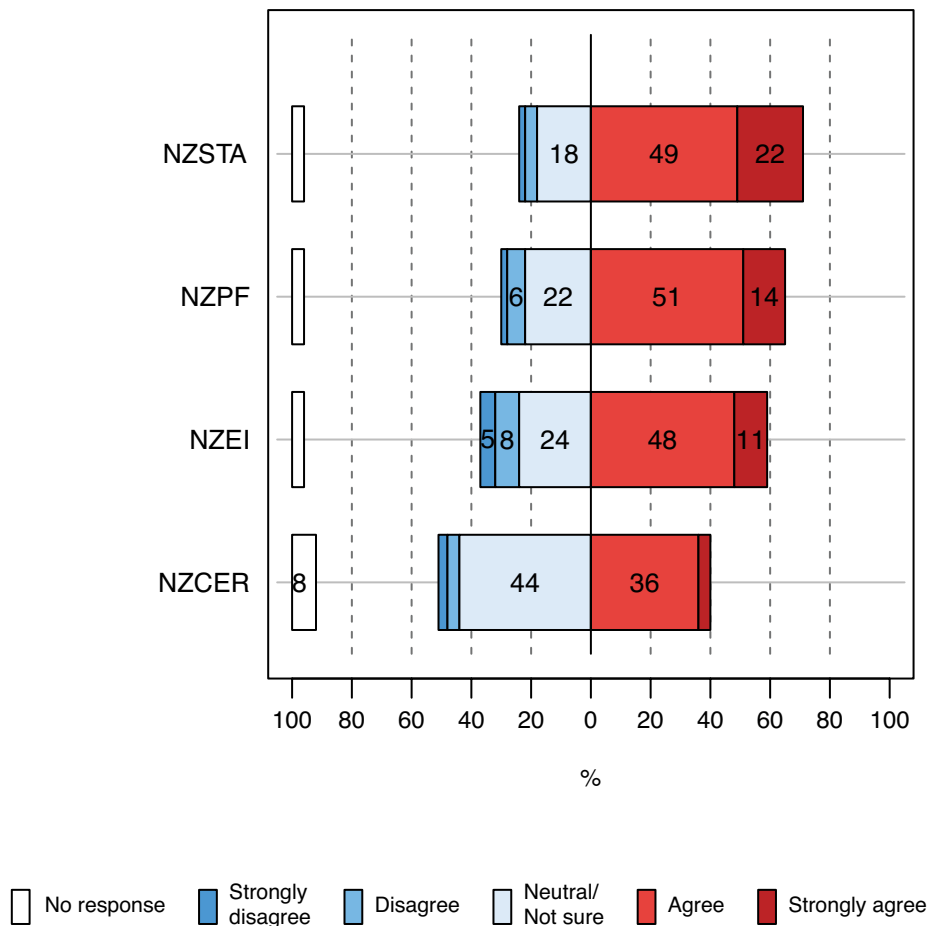
Schools with a 4–5-year review return time tended to be the most positive about ERO experiences and resources. Those on a 1–2-year review return tended to be the most critical, but on some items they had similar or higher proportions expressing strong agreement than those with a 4–5-year review return time. Those on a 3-year review return time tended to come in between, but with less strong agreement expressed.

Interaction with sector organisations

We also asked about the sector organisations, NZPF, NZEI, and NZSTA, which is contracted by the government to provide boards and principals with advice and support relating to the legal responsibilities of boards. And we asked about our own organisation, NZCER, which is set up to provide independent research-based information and advice.

Most principals thought they had helpful advice from the sector organisations, with around a fifth to a quarter neutral or unsure. Almost half the principals were neutral or unsure about advice from NZCER, which may mean they did not use the organisation’s resources in 2016.

FIGURE 11: Principals’ views of helpfulness of advice from sector organisations and NZCER (n=200)



4.

Discussion

This information from the 2016 national survey raises a number of questions about the resourcing and support of our primary and intermediate schools. It also shows that, while schools did work together, many were also in competition, and many were not used to sharing and discussing their practice challenges with other schools. The effective development of Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako will therefore need particular attention paid to these two key elements in the deeper collaboration that they rely on.

Four aspects of the 2016 national survey findings are particularly pertinent in relation to school resourcing. First, school decile was not related to views of the sufficiency of government funding or staffing. This would suggest that the decile component of operational funding may not be the central issue in relation to views of the sufficiency of funding. This report shows that low-decile schools faced more complexities in their work, including higher rates of student mobility. Therefore any changes based, for example, on predictive risk modelling of individual student achievement, will need to also consider what these will mean for low-decile schools, and ensure that their needs continue to be met. Secondly, the sufficiency of staffing was also an issue, and changes to the operational funding formulae will not resolve the gaps that around two-thirds of the principals reported. Thirdly, there were issues around the supply of suitable teachers, which were most acutely felt in low-decile schools, but not only there. Fourthly, there were issues around the uneven distribution of students among our schools, and some question marks round the framing of school enrolment zones.

Principals' views of the government education agencies were more positive than negative, with a substantial minority reporting a neutral view, or that they were unsure. This could indicate that the latter had little to do with the agencies, reinforcing the sense of autonomy that comes through in the majority of principals thinking they did not need external expertise, or could readily access it. I suspect there would be some differences in perspective if we had surveyed experts who work with schools, or asked this question of ERO reviewers in relation to some items. Anecdotally, for example, the depth of teacher inquiry and analysis of student achievement data are aspects that PLD providers and advisers often comment on as needing more support in schools.

Government-funded PLD has been allocated in a new way in 2017, one that depends more on schools taking the initiative and responsibility to find what they need. While the information here points to confidence among many principals, it also points to difficulties for around a third of the principals in accessing what they need, or identifying who can best work with them. That is a substantial proportion, given the increasing expectations of schools.¹³

¹³ More from the 2016 national survey about the tensions for school leaders in relation to workload and their sense that too much is being asked of them can be read in Wylie, C. (2017). *Principals and their work*. Wellington: NZCER. Available on the National Survey website: www.nzcer.org.nz/research/national-survey

