

How our education system is performing for literacy: Progress and achievement of New Zealand learners in English medium settings



Summary of literacy evidence from large scale studies – key findings

This flyer summarises a larger paper: *How our education system is performing for literacy: Progress and achievement of New Zealand learners in English medium settings*. The full paper provides a broad overview of how New Zealand students are doing in different aspects of literacy and how they are learning and developing their literacy skills. We also looked at the teaching practices used in New Zealand classrooms to teach literacy skills in comparison to other countries.

This paper draws upon both national and international data sources, including:

- Growing Up in New Zealand (GUINZ)
- National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA)
- The electronic assessment tool for teaching and learning (e-asTTle)
- National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA)
- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

What is literacy and why does it matter?

By the term literacy we mean reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and presenting. However, there is more evidence available on reading than any of the other aspects of literacy.

Literacy is a key part of foundation skills that enables us to make sense of the world and communicate effectively. We also know that literacy is fundamental to all areas of learning as it unlocks access to the wider curriculum. Having strong literacy knowledge, skills and capabilities is key to ensuring our learners have the access to all learning areas in the curriculum and a lifelong development after school years.



What did we find?

Achievement and progress

» Many New Zealand learners are doing well against national and international benchmarks of literacy achievement and are making good progress at an expected pace throughout year levels. Many of them enjoy reading and are confident in their reading and writing abilities. Compared to children in other countries, the average New Zealand learner in Year 5 generally performs around the middle in reading. Many children make good progress across their primary and early secondary years. The average 15-year-old learner does quite well in reading literacy internationally.

» However, there were wide variations in both achievement and progress against the curriculum expectations among learners. These variations started before schooling and continued in both primary and secondary schooling. The variations are wider than many other comparable countries and depending on the areas of literacy learning, it can be as wide as 4 years of schooling. Additionally, the proportion of learners meeting curriculum expectations for literacy declines as they move through year levels in primary school and may persist in secondary schooling. Since 2000, New Zealand's average reading performance internationally has declined significantly and there were many readers who were not confident and did not enjoy reading.

- » Many learners across all subgroups did well in their literacy learning. However, there were variations between subgroups including:
 - More girls than boys do well in literacy
 - More learners from higher socio-economic backgrounds and who attend higher socio-economic schools perform well than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds and those who attend lower socio-economic schools.
 - More Asian and Pākehā European learners do well in aspects of literacy.
 - There was limited data about learners with learning support needs, but we could infer that there is still unmet need that requires addressing.

- » Average rates of progress appear similar across all subgroups. However, there are large variations in progress across all subgroups. Differences in average achievement across subgroups largely reflect different starting points when entering the school system and a systematic failure to accelerate progress for those who have started behind. At a system-level therefore, those who start behind for literacy learning, or who fall behind early, often do not catch up.

- » Evidence tells us that not all learners are getting sufficient opportunities to learn and improve their literacy skills. This is particularly the case for many of our Māori and Pacific learners who experience lower expectations than other learners, and therefore their opportunities to learn are often less.

Student confidence and interest

- » Compared with learners in other countries, New Zealand children and young people were moderately positive about reading, but less confident. Fewer students were reading regularly for fun than in the past and some subgroups of students were less positive about reading than others.

- » Enjoyment of reading and confidence in reading and writing were both strongly related to student performance on those aspects of reading. Those who were less positive and less confident also had lower achievement. But we found that achievement appears to be more closely linked to learners' confidence than their attitudes.

Teaching practices

- » Across the education sector, we saw many areas where teaching and instruction of literacy skills in New Zealand classrooms are different from common international practices. While this paper does not intend to identify the best practice for teaching literacy, it indicates areas of practice that we may wish to examine further.

- » Home environment and teachers' confidence and preparation, along with their teaching methods, all play an important role in the development of learners' skills, behaviours, and interests in literacy. Generally, most of our teachers feel confident in teaching literacy and they use a variety of assessment strategies and digital technologies to promote learning. They reflect about their practice and access relevant PLD and resources regularly to support their teaching practice.

- » We found that the methods and strategies used by teachers in lessons varied greatly across New Zealand classrooms and not all schools have good or high-quality reading and writing instruction. Many children are found to be lacking a literacy-rich environment at home since an early age and many spend very little time reading in their own time. This was particularly true for boys, ākongā Māori, and students with special education needs.

