

Improving education outcomes

For Pacific Learners



➔ Pacific learners are part of a young, diverse and growing population. Their success is critical for the future of New Zealand.

Despite the initiatives in place to improve educational outcomes for Pacific learners, these students are still the most at risk of not succeeding in New Zealand schools.

Improving Education Outcomes for Pacific Learners (May 2012) is ERO's third report on the progress of schools in promoting the achievement, engagement and presence of Pacific students. It tells a similar story to our previous reports in 2009 and 2010 - while some schools are promoting success for Pacific students, there have been no significant system-wide changes to accelerate the progress of individual Pacific learners.

This leaflet provides a snapshot into what we found during our most recent evaluation. In doing so, we highlight key elements for improving Pacific learner achievement. We also provide self-review questions to get you thinking about Pacific learner achievement at your school.

In 2009, New Zealand was ranked 7th in the OECD for its reading literacy proficiency levels (PISA). If we only take into account the results of our Pacific learners, our ranking drops to 44th.

What we wanted to know

For the most recent Pacific national evaluation, we wanted to know what schools knew about Pacific student achievement since their last ERO review. To find out, ERO evaluated the level of Pacific achievement improvement in 302 schools. We focused on what improvements had been made in Pacific student presence, engagement, and achievement in literacy and numeracy; in the board of trustees' knowledge and understanding of Pacific issues; in the school's engagement with its Pacific community and in the quality of achievement information.

What we found

The overall result was disappointing. Despite a government focus on Pacific achievement and initiatives in place to target and monitor that achievement, we found little evidence of a system-wide improvement. More can be done to accelerate the progress of individual Pacific learners who are not achieving well.

Pasifika Education Plan

– a tool to help schools focus on raising Pacific learner achievement

The *Pasifika Education Plan (PEP)* is the Government's response to accelerating the progress of Pacific learners. The Plan identifies the goals, targets and actions for Pasifika education with a focus on the areas that will make a difference. While good progress has been made against some of the Plan's goals, there is still room for improvement. The next phase of the PEP – 2013-2017 - is underway and will continue the collective approach to raising the achievement level of Pacific learners.

Key elements for improving Pacific learner engagement

Identity, language and culture – different needs for different learners

Pacific learners are not a homogeneous group – they have different cultures, language and experience. There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to improving outcomes for Pacific learners. Teachers and programmes need to be flexible enough to address individual needs and to make the learning meaningful and specific to that student.

Leadership – knowing how to drive change

The success of individual learners is dependent on the expectations school leaders set for the school. Few schools in this evaluation had anything specifically about Pacific students in their charter. Effective school leadership focuses on improving educational outcomes for all learners. Effective leaders drive Pacific learners' achievement and change through setting clear expectations, building relationships and using assessment data to inform resource allocation.

A teacher has a management unit to lead success for Pacific students to respond to the needs identified in the school's achievement data. The lead teacher also provides advice about engaging students from different Pacific cultures.

(Medium decile full primary school with three percent Pacific students)

Partnership – connecting with the right people on the right level

An effective connection between home and school is an important ingredient to the success of Pacific learners. Most of the 302 schools evaluated did not have specific initiatives in place to engage Pacific communities. While teachers hold the key to getting the Pacific learner engaged in the classroom, they need to work in partnership with the families of Pacific learners to ensure that the learner has the support at home to succeed.

Ways to engage Pacific parents and communities:

- *Encourage more Pacific board members*
- *Use your staff with Pacific knowledge and contacts to liaise with parents*
- *Try different types of communication to make sure the message gets through*
- *Connect with Pacific community leaders eg, church leaders.*

Assessment information – understanding and using data to make a difference

Examining and using information about what students know and can do is essential to effective teaching and learning. ERO found that the use, type and quality of assessment information about Pacific learners varied. Some schools often took a broad approach that neglected the learning needs of individuals. Others had effective assessment processes in place and were using the information to develop strategies and track progress.

A strong assessment process will ensure you use the information you collect to decide what individual students need, what you need to focus on across the school and whether or not what you are doing is making a difference.

Pacific students are achieving at and above National Standards in reading, but below the standards in mathematics. Trustees, teachers, parents and students have used this information to inform professional learning and development in mathematics. Students and parents have used the information to set learning goals with the teacher. Parents have been advised how they can help their children at home.

(Small low decile primary school with 18 percent Pacific students)

A relevant and responsive curriculum – keeping things in context

The New Zealand Curriculum describes the importance of the school's curriculum having meaning for students, and connecting students with their wider lives. Only a small number of the schools evaluated had effectively included Pacific themes and contexts in their curriculum.

By including Pacific perspectives in the curriculum, you are giving Pacific learners the opportunity to draw on their own knowledge of the world. The more relevant the context, the more likely you are to engage and motivate the learner.

Pacific contexts are highlighted in many parts of the school's curriculum and include:

- *a social studies unit on sustainability that has a special focus on Tokelau and migration*
- *drama studies in 'Niu Sila' in the New Zealand literature standard in Year 10*
- *media studies programmes that provide a wide choice of topics (such as Pacific radio) that Pacific students are able to select according to their interests...*

(High decile secondary school with four percent Pacific students)



Self-review questions for thinking about Pacific learner achievement at your school

- What do you know about the language, culture and identity of your Pacific learners and their families?
- What do you know about the presence, engagement, progress and achievement of your Pacific learners and do you share this information with their families?
- How do you use achievement information and involve Pacific families in planning, monitoring progress and achievement, setting targets and evaluating the impact on Pacific learners?
- How do you actively ensure that Pacific learners have access to high quality culturally relevant programmes?
- How do you ensure that Pacific learners have opportunities to view themselves as successful learners with a contribution to make to others?
- How do you review your practices and challenge your own assumptions about partnerships with Pacific learners and their families?



Find out more

Read this report and others online at www.ero.govt.nz/national-reports

- Improving Education Outcomes for Pacific Learners (May 2012)
- Progress in Pacific Student Achievement: A pilot evaluation of Auckland schools (September 2009)
- Promoting Pacific Student Achievement (June 2010)

www.ero.govt.nz