



EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE
TE TARI AROTAKE MATAURANGA

How is my child doing?

Questions to ask at school



Who is this booklet for?

The Education Review Office (ERO) has written this booklet for everyone who parents a child – those who have care and responsibility for children attending a school. The word ‘parent’ is used in this book to include parents, caregivers, whānau and aiga.

Asking questions at school is one way you can find out how your child is doing, and also gives the teacher a chance to talk to you about how you can be involved.

The role of schools is to give your child the best possible opportunity to learn and to be successful. The best way to achieve this is for families and schools to work together, and for parents, caregivers, whānau and aiga to know they are welcome at school. If you feel shy, awkward or not confident, you can visit your child’s school together as a family, whānau or aiga, or take a friend along.



Your children will spend a lot of time at school. While they are at school, the teachers, the principal, and the board of trustees have responsibility for their education and wellbeing. As a parent or caregiver you have a particular interest in how well your child is doing at school. Creating a partnership between parents and the school is therefore very important. Together, parents and the school work to educate their children, helping them to develop into young adults who are confident, successful and happy.

Asking questions at school

Parents and caregivers want to know how well their children are doing at school, and if they are safe and happy. Teachers should welcome the chance to talk to a parent about a child’s progress, so don’t feel awkward about asking to see a teacher or the principal. This booklet outlines questions you may like to ask at your child’s school, and information you will find useful.

Why ask questions?

How do you know if your child is making good progress? How do you know what to expect of your child? Schools regularly send written reports home, and set up parent-teacher meetings and interviews for parents to discuss the school reports, portfolios and learning records. You can use these opportunities to find out more about what your child is doing, how well they are doing in relation to the National Standards (in primary schools), and how you can help. If you have a child at secondary school you will want to find out about subject choices and about the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA).

How do I go about asking questions at school?

Check with the teacher when would be a good time to talk. Although teachers are busy people, your interest in your child will be important to them. You may want to talk to them at times outside the usual parent-teacher meetings. You could phone the school or send a note with your child. Or, if you’re at the school, just mention that you’d like to make a time to talk. The teacher may set up a discussion with you and your child. The teacher may also be happy to have a conversation with you via email. If so, ask for an email address.

Where does ERO fit in?

The Education Review Office (ERO) reviews all schools in New Zealand, and publishes its reports on the website: www.ero.govt.nz. You will want to ask specific questions about your child – the ERO report will tell you how well the board of trustees and the principal are managing the school and the overall education of the students. This report is a useful basis for questions you might have about aspects of the school, such as how well children are learning at the school, how the school engages with its community, the school’s policies on discipline, complaints procedures, school trips, and so on.

for parents

key points

Reporting to parents

Schools are required to report to parents of primary school children at least twice a year. Reports should be in plain language and should explain how your child is progressing in all subjects (in addition to the formal National Standards information).

As well as written reports from the school, there are other ways in which schools report a child's progress to family, whānau and aiga, such as via a parent portal on a website or by email.

At primary school, children may have a portfolio, either in hard copy or digital form, that shows what they have been learning and the progress they have made, with written comments by the teacher. Some schools invite parents to assemblies where special achievements by students are recognised and celebrated.

Most schools set up interviews after written reports have been sent home, to talk to parents and caregivers about setting goals for the child's next steps.

Discussions with the teacher, child and parent/caregiver are also common, and give an opportunity for children to summarise their learning and progress.

School policies

Every school is required to have policies that ensure the school is managed well, and that children are being given a high quality education.

You can read the National Administration Guidelines for Schools on the Ministry of Education website: www.minedu.govt.nz, by entering 'National Administration Guidelines' in the search box.

The principal

The principal manages the day-to-day running of the school, and employs the teachers and other school staff. The professional development of teachers is managed by the principal. If you want to see the principal, call the school office administrator/secretary for an appointment.

The board of trustees

The school's board of trustees is responsible for the overall governance of the school. The board includes parents, the principal, a staff member and in some cases, a student representative. The board employs the principal, approves the goals and targets in the school's charter, and sets the policies and budget for the operation of the school.

You can ask about the goals and targets that have been set and see how well your school is doing in meeting these when the annual report is presented to the school community. You can expect that the school will set goals and targets to improve the learning levels of all children at your school.

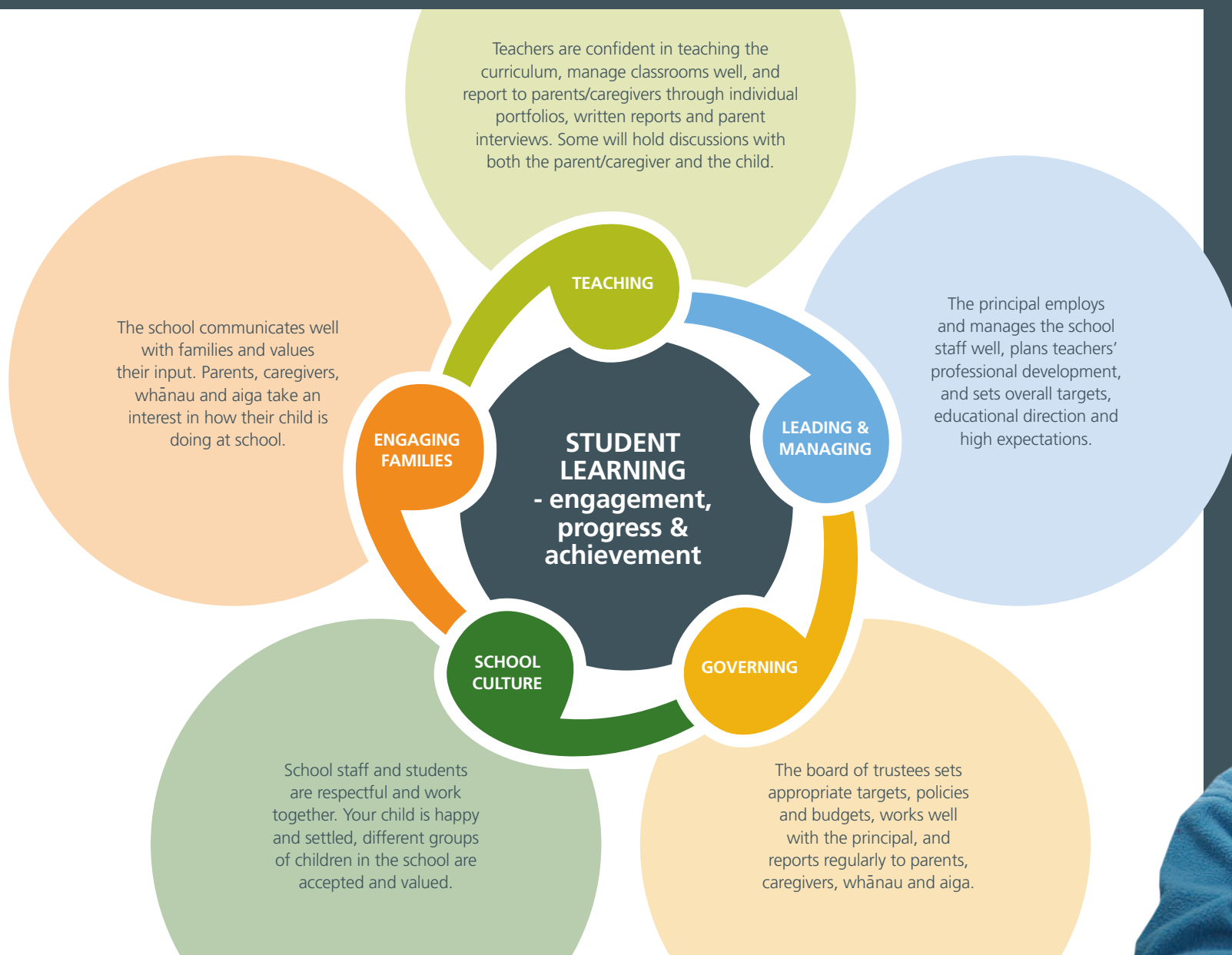
Parents can attend board meetings and raise matters with the board. Ask at your school for the meeting dates. Talk to the board chairperson if you want to raise a matter at a meeting.

Any parent can stand for election to the board and elections are held every three years. For more information visit the New Zealand School Trustees' Association website: www.nzsta.org.nz.

- Parents and family, whānau or aiga, are a vital part of every child's school education. Together with the school they can create a partnership that nurtures learning and success.
- Visit the school to talk to the teacher about your child. If you are not comfortable about going on your own, take a friend or family member.
- The role of the school is to give your child the best possible opportunity to learn and to be successful. You should do all you can to help with this.
- If you don't understand something that you feel is important, do ask about it. Talk to your child's teacher, or look at some of the information that is readily available on websites, or in printed information from the Ministry of Education or the Education Review Office.



The Six Dimensions of a Successful School



ERO uses this diagram when it reviews schools. It shows how all aspects of a school relate to each other and have an impact on children's learning. Parents, caregivers, whānau and aiga are a vital piece of the picture, and teachers welcome their contribution.

The goal of every school is for each child to make good progress and achieve well in a school that is well-run, where teachers are valued, and where parents, families and the wider community are part of the partnership that supports their children.



QUESTIONS TO ASK AT

primary school

HOW WELL IS MY CHILD LEARNING?

How do I know my child is making good progress at the right level? What does a good report look like?

- In the written comments on a portfolio or school report, the teacher will tell you how your child is doing in relation to the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics.
- You can ask the teacher to explain what the report means.
- You can also ask how your child is doing in other areas of the curriculum like science, social studies, health, technology, physical education and the arts. All primary schools are required to teach these, and they should all feature in school reports to parents.

Is my child struggling with anything? If so, with what in particular?

- The teacher will be able to tell you if your child is not doing as well as expected, what the teacher is doing about this, and if there is anything you can do to help. You should also find out how much work is needed for your child to catch up.
- Your child may be given an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or you can ask for one. IEPs are designed to use the school's programme to suit the needs of your child. The IEP will have some learning goals, and will set out what is needed to support your child in achieving the goals. Because you know your child best, you will have an important contribution to make to the IEP.
- For more information visit the Ministry of Education website: www.minedu.govt.nz, and enter 'IEP guidelines' in the search box.

What does it mean if the teacher simply says my child is 'on track' to meet the National Standards?

- The National Standards are not a test. The standards describe what your child should know and be able to do in reading, writing and mathematics for each primary school year. Parents need to know where their child is in relation to the standards and if the progress they are making is as expected. The teacher should be able to explain in detail how well your child is doing. The goal is for every child to meet the standards for reading, writing and mathematics at the level appropriate to their age or school year level.
- You can ask the teacher what 'on track' means, and how a judgement is made about where your child is in relation to meeting the standards.
- Ask the teacher why it is important for your child to meet the National Standards.
- For information about National Standards visit the Ministry of Education website: www.minedu.govt.nz >> The Ministry >> Education initiatives >> National Standards.

What sort of information does the teacher or school have that can show me how well my child is doing?

- You can ask to see records of your child's learning: the portfolios and work samples, as well as results of standardised tests (such as aSTTle, PAT, STAR and NumPA). You can ask how the teacher assesses these, and what criteria teachers use.
- For an explanation of assessment terms see the 2008 ERO report at: www.ero.govt.nz >> National Reports >> Assessment in Primary Schools: A Guide for Parents.

What will my child learn next?

- The teacher will explain what the class is going to do, what she/he is doing with your child, and what she/he will expect your child to work on.
- Ask the teacher how your child will be told what to concentrate on next.



QUESTIONS TO ASK AT all schools

IS MY CHILD SAFE AND HAPPY AT SCHOOL?

How does the teacher know my child is learning to the best of her/his ability?

- The teacher will be able to tell you if there are any particular areas of concern. You should also alert the teacher to any concerns about the child at home.

Does my child get on well with other children?

- Ask what the school does to make sure all children are included in activities inside and outside the classroom.

How do I know my child is safe and not being bullied?

- If you believe your child is being bullied you need to talk to the teacher about it.
- Ask about the school's policies and how it manages bullying.

How can I help if my child has a problem?

- A parent should always go to the child's teacher first about a problem.
- If your child tells you about worrying incidents that happen at school, do talk to the teacher, even if you think it may not be very important.

If I have a concern, how do I raise it with my child's teacher or the school?

- If you have a concern about your child or the school, or a complaint, you will want to know how it will be dealt with. Go to the teacher in the first instance, or the principal if that is more appropriate.
- You may like to write down the circumstances so you know what to say when you talk to the teacher or principal, or even the board of trustees. Think about what you would like to happen, so you can tell the teacher or the school what you expect.
- Check the school's website or ask the teacher about the school's policies on making a complaint.

What standards of behaviour should I expect my child to experience at school?

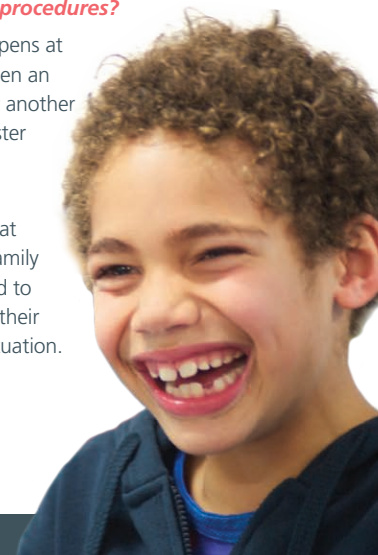
- Standards of behaviour will be set out in the school policies, and will often be communicated in a parent booklet or prospectus, or on the school's website.
- There will be expectations for the whole school and, in some cases, at class level and these are likely to be displayed prominently in the school.
- Ask the teacher if you have any questions about uniform, clothing or how your child should expect to be treated by other students and the school staff.

How should I expect the school to treat my child?

- Parents of children with special education needs, special abilities, or who are part of a group whose first language is not English may want to ask the teacher about the school's policies and procedures for working with these students.
- While all children must be given equal opportunities to learn, some children will benefit from specific attention to their particular needs, abilities and talents. Good schools treat diversity in their student population as a bonus. You can ask about this in your child's school.
- If your child has special education needs, you will want as much information as you can get about how the school will support your child. Regulations and requirements are set out on the Ministry of Education's website, and the school will have a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) who will work with you to make sure your child is given the attention she/he needs. For more information visit the Ministry of Education's website: www.minedu.govt.nz and enter 'special needs' in the search box.

How do I find out about the school's safety procedures?

- Ask what happens at the school when an earthquake or another potential disaster occurs during school time.
- Ask about what parents and family members need to know to help their child in this situation.



secondary school

HOW WELL IS MY CHILD LEARNING?

How do I know my daughter or son is making good progress at the right level?

- In the written school report, the teachers will tell you how your teenager is doing in all the subjects being taken.
- Teachers will be able to tell you if your daughter or son is not doing as well as expected, what the teachers are doing about this, and will suggest ways your teenager can help him or herself.
- Ask about your daughter or son's progress towards meeting NCEA levels 1, 2 and 3 during each year, and how many credits she/he should be gaining.
- Ask the teacher why gaining NCEA levels is important.
- For Years 9 and 10, ask early about the right courses or units your teenager needs to take to achieve meaningful qualifications, or to help her/him achieve future career goals.

Who should I speak to if I am worried about my teenager's progress?

- Because secondary students have several teachers, you will first need to talk to the form teacher or dean. Ask your daughter or son who that is.
- You can find out from the school how to make an appointment.
- If there are specific subjects concerning you, ask which other teachers you should talk to.

Where can I find more information about careers and school subjects?

- Ask the teacher or careers advisor for information, or go to the Careers New Zealand website: www.careers.govt.nz.

Should I know what all the education words and jargon mean?

- If the teacher or your teenager uses expressions that you don't understand, just ask what they mean. You cannot be expected to know all the different names for courses, programmes and projects in a secondary school.
- You can look up most things online, but your teenager's teachers will also be happy to explain the meaning and how particular aspects of these various things will affect your daughter or son's education. It is far better to ask at the time, than wish later that you had understood more.

How do I help my teenager choose the right subjects?

- When a student chooses subjects for future years it is important to keep options open. For example, it is not a good idea to drop general science, when chemistry or biology may be an essential subject for a course they would like to do later. It is really useful for you to have a good discussion with the teacher, dean or form teacher, and your teenager before final decisions are made.
- Secondary schools often have careers advisers who can talk to you and your teenager about possible careers and the subjects needed to prepare for these. Ask to talk to the teacher or careers adviser along with your daughter or son.
- Years 9 and 10 are important – they give a grounding in basic subjects, and help a student prepare for choosing NCEA subjects. Ask the teacher how your teenager will choose NCEA subjects. Ask how the choice at this stage will affect any future career choices. The teacher can tell you what information has been given to your daughter or son.



Ko te Tamaiti te Pūtake o te Kaupapa The Child – the Heart of the Matter

Contacts



EDUCATION REVIEW OFFICE

For individual school reports and national reports on education issues

National Office, PO Box 2799, Wellington 6140
Email: info@ero.govt.nz Phone: 04-499 2489



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

For information about National Standards and NCEA, go to the Ministry website and type in National Standards or NCEA in the search box

www.minedu.govt.nz
National Office, PO Box 1666, Wellington 6140
Phone: 04-463 8000



CAREERS NEW ZEALAND

For information about planning a career

www.careersnz.govt.nz
Phone: 0800 222 733



NEW ZEALAND SCHOOL TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

For information about boards of trustees

www.nzsta.org.nz
PO Box 5123, Wellington 6145
Phone: 04-473 4955



NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

For information about how NCEA works

www.nzqa.govt.nz
PO Box 160, Wellington 6140
Phone: 0800 697 296



YOUTH GUARANTEE

For information about possible vocational pathways (careers)

www.youthguarantee.net.nz