

Choosing a School for a Five Year Old



Rurea, taitea, kia toitu, ko taikaka anake

Strip away the bark. Expose the heartwood.

Get to the heart of the matter.

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Choosing a School for a Five Year Old

To parents and caregivers

As your child approaches their fifth birthday you will, no doubt, be considering how they can get the best possible education in their vital first years at school as well as for the future.

Parents like to find out about the schools that their child could attend before making a decision about enrolment.

In this publication, the Education Review Office (ERO) explains the kinds of schools, classes and teaching there are for New Zealand five year olds and some of the words used to describe schools and classroom activities.

Principals and teachers are used to parents asking about their school and their programmes. You may phone any school and make an appointment to visit the school, and to meet the principal and the teachers of five year olds. In many schools, the principal has teaching responsibilities and may not be available to see you if you call in unannounced. So it is a good idea to contact the school to make an appointment to see the principal, which will ensure you that both have uninterrupted discussion time, free from distractions. You may also be able to look around the classrooms and playgrounds and watch some lessons.

Principals and teachers are used to being asked questions and are keen for you to be involved in your child's schooling – so do feel you can ask for explanations. When parents know about school and are interested in their child's schooling there is a greater likelihood that children will be successful at school.

In this publication ERO suggests some questions to ask and some things to look for in the school and classrooms. It is useful for you to clarify in your own mind what is important for you in giving your child a good start at school.

ERO's job is to review schools and early childhood education services. ERO review officers go into all schools and classrooms to evaluate the teaching and learning. These reviewers see a wide range of both good schools and less successful schools. In this publication we have drawn on their experience of the best new entrant classrooms in New Zealand.

How to Use this Publication

There are five sections, the content of which is described below.

1. **Choosing a School: Step by Step** – page 3

Follow these steps to make a list of possible schools for your child. Then use the **Information for Parents** section to help you choose between them.

2. **Key Questions to Ask at a School** – page 6

Use this list of questions as a basis for your discussions with the school principal.

3. **Information for Parents** – page 7

Find information about primary schools in this section. It is in alphabetical order with *See also* pointers to other information. There are explanations of some of the things you may want to know about schools and teaching programmes for five year olds. There are also comments on what a good school provides so you have a standard for your judgements. You can find out more about the differences between schools in this section.

4. **Five Year Olds in the Classroom** – page 36

Read some descriptions of good classrooms in this section.

5. **Useful Addresses** – page 45

Use this list to find addresses of local Education Review Offices and other organisations mentioned in this publication.

1

Choosing a School: Step by Step

Working through the following steps will help you sort out which school will suit your child best.

1. Make a list of possible schools
2. Narrow the list
3. Consider the quality of education the school provides
4. Make appointments to visit the schools you are considering
5. Enrol your child at the school you have chosen

1 Make a list of possible schools

Consider:

- transport to and from school
- closeness to your home or work
- whether there is a safe way to walk to and from school
- schools you will choose or have chosen for your child's brothers and sisters
- the schools your child's friends will be going to
- the special character of an integrated school

Look for the names and addresses of schools near to where you live or work. Find these addresses:

- in the telephone directory
- from maps
- by contacting the nearest Education Review Office
- by contacting the local Ministry of Education

2 Narrow the list

There are different types of school, some of which may be available in your locality. Look in Section 3 – **Information for Parents** under the following headings:

- Composite school
- Contributing school

- Full primary school
- Integrated school
- Kura kaupapa Māori
- Private school
- Special education

If you are interested in the size of the school or the way junior classes are organised look in Section 3 – **Information for Parents** under these headings:

- Closed roll
- Open plan or variable space
- Roll size
- Single cell classroom

If you prefer a particular type of school or if roll size is an issue for you, find out the types and rolls of schools on your own list by:

- asking each school
- reading ERO reports
- asking the Ministry of Education

3 Consider the quality of education the school provides

The quality of the education provided is the responsibility of the board of trustees.

Look in Section 3 – **Information for Parents** for:

- Board of trustees
- Principal

Members of the board of trustees, the principal and teachers of the school should be willing to make a time when they are not teaching children to talk with you and answer your questions about the school. Most schools also have written information available.

Look in Section 3 – **Information for Parents** for:

- Prospectus or information booklet
- ERO
- Documents and policies

- Charter

Your child's learning is the most important issue to consider. Find out how teaching and learning are managed and organised day to day.

Look in Section 3 – **Information for Parents** for:

- Curriculum
- Learning objectives/learning outcomes

4 Make appointments to visit the schools you are considering

- Arrange to see the principal and any teachers of five year olds
- Ask to visit classrooms during the school day
- Observe children in the playground

Look at the relationships among children and between teachers and children. Expect the children to be contented and absorbed in their learning task. Do not expect a junior classroom to be silent. There should be a purposeful buzz of activity with children asking questions and having conversations with adults and with other children.

Read the descriptions of good classrooms in Section 4 – **Five Year Olds in the Classroom**

Make sure that your child is likely to learn and be happy and secure in this environment.

5 Enrol your child at the school you have chosen

- The school will tell you how to do this.

2 Key Questions to Ask at a School

If I choose this school do you have a place for my child?

What is special about this school?

What will my child learn in the first year at school?

How will I know what my child has learned?

How does the school make sure that children are safe and happy?

What should I do if I am worried about my child's progress or experiences at school?

When will I be given information about my child's progress?

Will I be able to come to school to help or be with my child in the classroom?

What fees or donations does the school ask for?

May I have a copy of the school charter?

May I read the last ERO report on the school?

Will my child be given a stationery list? If so may I see it? Where do I buy the school stationery from?

Is there an enrolment scheme in place? If so may I see a copy of it?

Tell me about the school day.

- What time does the school day begin and end?
- What are the arrangements for the beginning of the day and for collecting children after school?
- How are intervals organised?
- What are the arrangements for eating lunch?
- What should my child wear to school?
- What would my child need to bring on the first day?
- Where are the toilets? Do children have to ask to use the toilets during class time?

What are the arrangements if my child gets sick at school or has to stay at home because of illness?

What are the arrangements if there is an emergency?

You may have questions about what you have observed at the school and you may want to ask questions about matters of special interest to you. A good principal will see the education of your child as a responsibility shared between school and home and will be pleased to answer all your questions.

3 Information for Parents

The information in this part is in alphabetical order under the following headings:

Age groups, year levels and class names	Exemplars	Private school
AKA	Family grouped class or whānau	Prospectus or information booklet
Assembly	Fees and donations	Reading Recovery
Assessment	Full primary school	Reports
asTTle	Gifted children	Resource and itinerant teachers
Board of trustees	Homeschooling	Resources
Bullying	ICT	Roll size
Charter	IEP	Rules
Closed roll	Immunisation	Running records
Complaints	Integrated curriculum	SEA
Composite class	Integrated school	School websites
Composite school	JOST	SENCO
Compulsory schooling	Kaiako	Single cell classroom
Computers	Kaiāwhina	Single sex, girls-only and boys-only schools
Contributing school	Kura kaupapa Māori	Six year nets
Correspondence School	Learning objectives/ learning outcomes	Special education
Curriculum	Left-handedness	State school
Curriculum management document	Māori immersion classes	Subjects
Cybersafety and the internet	New entrant	Syllabus
Discipline	NumP	Syndicate teams
Displays	Open plan or variable space	Teacher aides
Documents and policies	ORRS	Teachers
EOTC	Parents and caregivers	Type of school
ERO	PIPS	
ESOL	Principal	

A

Age groups, year levels and class names

- Schools use age groups, year levels and class names to describe different classes. In some schools classes are named by a room number or a teacher's name.
- A five year old in Year 0 or Year 1 may be called a new entrant and may also be referred to as a J1 or Junior One. The five year old may be in the New Entrant Class or Room 7 or Mr Riki's Room.
- Six and seven year olds are usually in Years 2 and 3.
- Eight, nine and 10 year olds are in Years 4, 5 and 6.
- Eleven and 12 year olds are in Years 7 and 8. Intermediate schools have Year 7 and Year 8 students only. The oldest children in a full primary school are in Years 7 and 8.

See also: Composite school, Contributing school, Full primary school, Composite class, Single cell classroom, Open plan or variable space

AKA

- Aro matawai Urunga-ā-kura or AKA is the assessment used by teachers in Māori immersion classes. Teachers use it to collect information on the skills, knowledge and understanding of five-year-old children entering school. Children are asked to do tasks that involve numbers, reading and writing, and telling stories they have heard.
- Good schools will explain the tests to you and will tell you how your child got on with the tasks.

See also: School Entry Assessment (SEA)

Assembly

- An assembly is usually a weekly or fortnightly gathering of the whole school, where children celebrate each others learning achievements and efforts. Children may all be involved in combined singing, and they may also have work to share.
- In a good school you could expect to see children from as young as five years old taking a lead role in aspects of the school assembly — they may read out sports notices, introduce guest speakers, or present special awards.

- Good schools make sure parents know where and when assemblies are held and that parents and whānau feel welcome to attend.
- You can attend the assemblies at your child's school. Ask about the place, day and time the school assembly is held.

Assessment

- Assessment is teachers' evidence of how well children have learned. Running records, files (profiles or portfolios) of children's work and marking are forms of assessment.
- Good schools use ongoing assessment of children's learning to assist them to plan teaching and learning programmes that suit the needs of children. They keep records of each child's achievement.
- Good schools have sufficient information after about one month to report to you on your five year old's learning needs.
- Ask when you will be told how your child is getting on at school.
- Tests are also a form of assessment. There are many ways schools test or assess students. Different schools use different tests. You can ask which ones your child's school uses.

asTTle

- asTTle (assessment Tools To learn) is a series of reading, writing and mathematics tests that give detailed information that teachers of older children use to plan learning programmes and track children's progress.
- Although schools do not use asTTle with your five year old they may use it when your child reaches Year 5 (at 9 to 10 years old).

B

Board of trustees

- The board of trustees is elected by the parents of the children in the school and is responsible for everything the school does. The board of trustees is the employer of all the staff, including the principal and the teachers.
- In a good school the trustees and the principal respect each other's roles and responsibilities, relationships are harmonious and business-like, and together they make decisions that benefit children. A good board of trustees makes sure parents know where and when its meetings are held and welcomes parents to these meetings.

- Attend a board meeting and see how the board controls the operation of the school, what it sees as important and how trustees interact with one another and with the principal and staff.

See also: Principal, Charter, Curriculum

Bullying

- Bullying is physical, verbal and emotional assault. Bullying can occur among pupils or can involve teachers. All schools should take steps to eliminate bullying and it should never be dismissed as simply part of growing up.
- Good schools are very public about their opposition to bullying and intervene when bullying or any other violence is suspected or identified. They actively promote considerate and non-violent behaviour.
- Find out what the school does to prevent violence and bullying and how it deals with complaints.
- If you think your child is being bullied, talk to the teacher or principal.

See also: Complaints, Discipline

C

Charter

- The school charter is the signed agreement between each board of trustees and the Government. Each charter is the school's planning document.
- The annual plan part of the charter, must be reviewed each year. In its annual report the school will present its evaluation of progress against the planned objectives.
- Good schools will include the community in the next year's planning. This helps school boards and their staff to make sure that everything they do reflects the educational needs of their students. Over the years, a successful planning and reporting process will establish direction for the school.
- Read the school's charter. Expect the targets and goals to be reflected in what you hear about the school. These should also be evident in what you have seen in the school and should match your own hopes for your child's education.

See also: Curriculum, Prospectus or information booklet

Closed roll

- Some schools have an enrolment policy (or enrolment scheme) in place to avoid overcrowding. Where a school has an enrolment scheme the roll may be closed and you may not be able to enrol your child.
- Good schools will inform parents of children who live in the home zone of their absolute right to enrol at the school. If you have chosen a school with an enrolment scheme, make sure that it meets your own criteria. The popularity of the school may be based on factors not necessarily important to you and your child.
- Ask to see a copy of the enrolment scheme. This document will outline the priorities for acceptance into the school. This information will help you understand the criteria on which decisions are made. The home zone with clearly defined boundaries will also be outlined in the enrolment scheme.

See also: Roll size

Complaints

- There are times when parents are not satisfied with something to do with their child or the school and want to make a complaint to the school.
- Good schools have a complaints policy outlining how complaints should be made and how they will be investigated. Using the procedures outlined in such a policy is particularly useful, for example, if your child is being bullied.
- Make sure that the school has a written complaints policy when you are looking through policies and other written information the school provides.

See also: Bullying, Documents and policies

Composite class

- A composite class has more than one age group or year level of children. For example, there might be five, six and seven year olds in one classroom or a school with two teachers might have a junior classroom for children in their first four years at school and a senior classroom for children in Years 5 to 8.
- In good classes, including composite classrooms, the teacher ensures that learning objectives are challenging for all children. No child is held back because of other children in the class and the younger children are stimulated by the more advanced work they see the older children doing.

- Observe a composite class in action during an ordinary school day. Children should be industriously absorbed in their own learning. Different age groups should work together as well as separately. Teachers will work with groups and will move around the room. Read the descriptions of composite classes in Section 4 – **Five Year Olds in the Classroom**.

See also: Open plan or variable space, Single cell classroom

Composite school

- Composite schools combine primary and secondary education and take students from five year olds right through to Year 13. Composite schools are sometimes known as Area Schools and they are mainly in rural areas. There are also private and integrated composite schools in urban areas.
- Good composite schools draw on the benefits to students of having a wide range of age groups in one school. They are not just a separate primary, intermediate, secondary school on the same site. Students' education should progress easily without disruptions at each stage of schooling. Consideration will often be given to safeguarding children's safety, by allowing for the range of physical and emotional capabilities, and allocating different play areas to children of different age groups during interval breaks.
- Observe the relationships and definitions between levels of schooling. Are the transitions through stages of schooling easy? Is the school leaver whose entire schooling has been in the composite school confident and well motivated?

Compulsory schooling

- The law requires all children living in New Zealand to be enrolled at a registered school on their sixth birthday and to remain at school until their 16th birthday. It is illegal for schools to enrol children at school before their fifth birthday. You will need to show your child's birth certificate when you enrol them in a school.
- Most children start school on their fifth birthday. Good schools make arrangements for children and their parents to visit the school in the few months before the child is five.
- Good schools show a genuine interest in the information you may have on your child's learning in an early childhood service, such as homebased care and education, kindergartens, kōhanga reo, daycare or playcentre.

Computers

- Computers in schools are tools that children of all ages will be encouraged to use to support their learning.

- Good schools will relate computer work to the learning programme and will explain to children what they will learn through the computer activities.
- Ask the teacher what he or she expects your five year old to be learning through using a computer, how and where your child will use a computer, and what special rules there are for children using computers.

See also: ICT, Cybersafety and the internet

Contributing school

- A contributing school has children from new entrants at the age of five up to students who are in Year 6. After a contributing school most children go to an intermediate school, middle school or a Year 7 to 13 school. Most contributing schools are in urban areas.
- For a five year old there is little difference between a contributing school and a full primary school.
- Consider how the change of school later on at Year 7 may affect your child.

See also: Full primary school, Composite school

Correspondence School

- The New Zealand Correspondence School provides education for students who, for some reason, cannot attend a regular school. Parents usually supervise their child's learning.
- Contact the New Zealand Correspondence School for more information.

Curriculum

- The curriculum is what the school teaches and what the children learn. Teaching the curriculum is the school's most important responsibility. The main job of teachers is to plan and organise teaching and learning programmes for the children according to approved curriculum statements.
- *The New Zealand Curriculum* is the official policy about what teachers should teach and children should learn in New Zealand schools.
- In good schools all children, including five year olds, are involved in learning programmes in reading, writing and other language skills as well as mathematics, science, social studies, the arts, technology, health and physical education.
- Ask the principal or new entrant teacher what your child will be learning in the first few years at school. You should see evidence of activities in all of these areas of learning in your observations in classrooms.

See also: Learning objectives/learning outcomes, Subjects

Curriculum management document

- The school's curriculum management document is the teachers' planning for how learning will be managed in the classroom. This is sometimes called 'the scheme'. It sets out what the teachers will be teaching in the classroom, and what they hope children will achieve and learn through the teaching programme.
- In good schools the curriculum management document is the basis of all teacher planning. Teachers will frequently refer to their own planning and to the document, and make adjustments in order to make sure they meet their own objectives for teaching your child and others in the classroom.

See also: Learning objectives/learning outcomes, Curriculum

Cybersafety and the internet

- Most schools have computers in every classroom and some of these are connected to the internet. Good schools have policies to protect children from unwanted images.
- Ask about the school's policies for cybersafety, and if the school uses the Netsafe Kit and the Hector Safety Button. You can find out more about this on: www.netsafe.org.nz

D

Discipline

- School discipline (behaviour management) systems set boundaries for children and teachers. Children cannot be expected to learn in an environment that is out of control and are more likely to feel safe and secure in a school with good behaviour management systems in place.
- **It is illegal for a teacher to use physical force to discipline a child.**
- Good schools have well-defined, consistent guidelines for behaviour so that children know what is expected of them and find it easy to comply with rules. In good schools teachers have effective strategies that ensure children's learning is not disrupted by other children. In a good school, behaviour management systems accentuate the positive. Children are encouraged to develop self-management, problem-solving and communication skills.
- Ask the principal about school rules, classroom behaviour management, punishments, praise and rewards and the school's strategies to prevent bullying. Think about whether your child will understand the rules and feel secure at school.

- Ask the principal how the school communicates with parents about any concerns it may have about children. And ask how parents communicate any concerns they may have with the school.

See also: Bullying, Complaints, Rules

Displays

- Children like to see their work attractively displayed at school. They enjoy reading displays of their own work and the work of others and can learn from these.
- In good schools children's work is displayed in classrooms and in public places like the foyer, the displays are fresh and lively, every child's work is represented and children want to show you their own work.
- Expect to see displays of children's work that celebrate, reinforce or highlight children's achievements not just in art but also in a range of learning areas. Some displays will be digital photographs that children or adults have taken. Many will have captions outlining what children were learning.

See also: Section 4 – Five Year Olds in the Classroom

Documents and policies

- Documents are official written papers about decisions the school has made.
- Well-documented charters (including strategic plans), policies, procedures and programmes are part of good school management.
- Good schools have documents on the whole range of activities and responsibilities of the school, from those that show how they teach each of the different subjects in the curriculum, to those that outline how they deal with complaints from parents. The school's documents should be written in clear straightforward language.
- Read the school's documents or policies on topics that interest you. Schools have documents about such matters as: mathematics, discipline, complaints procedures, education outside the classroom and students with special abilities.

See also: Charter, ERO, Curriculum management document

E

EOTC

- Education Outside the Classroom or EOTC, is activity that takes place away from the classroom. It is to extend and enhance children's learning.
- EOTC could include trips to the zoo or the museum, going to a play or a musical performance, or visiting a marae. Children could be asked to bring a picnic lunch, perhaps for a trip to the rock pools at the seaside.
- Good schools will explain why the children are going on visits and how each activity contributes to your child's learning.
- Ask the teacher how many adults there will be on a trip, and what the safety procedures are for travel and for managing children.

See also: Curriculum

ERO

- The Education Review Office or ERO is the Government department that has the responsibility of reviewing schools and early childhood education services. ERO publishes reports on the quality of education each school is providing for children. You can get an ERO report from the school or from the ERO office nearest to the school. The addresses of ERO offices are listed at the end of this publication. You can also read ERO reports on the ERO website www.ero.govt.nz
- ERO reports are available on all schools. They comment on the things that are done well in the school as well as where improvement is needed. Good schools will take steps to remedy any problems identified in an ERO report.
- Read the ERO report on each school you are considering. Ask questions about the ERO report when you meet the principal, teachers or members of the board of trustees. ERO reports often alert the principal and board of trustees to a need for improvement and parents should look for evidence that the school has responded positively to ERO's independent evaluation.

See also: Section 5 – Useful Addresses

ESOL

- Good schools acknowledge the need to develop some children's language skills by providing well-planned programmes of English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL).

- The Ministry of Education provides additional resources to schools to meet the needs of English language learners.
- If your child is a newly arrived immigrant or a refugee ask about ESOL programmes in the school.

See also: Curriculum

Exemplars

- An exemplar is a piece of students' work with the teacher's comments to show good work for a level in the national curriculum.
- Exemplars will help you to understand what work at a particular level looks like and will help the teacher to identify your child's next learning steps.
- Teachers use the National Exemplars to compare students' work with national standards. National Exemplars have also been developed for pāngarau, pūtaio, and hangarau in classrooms where the teaching is in te reo Māori.
- Some schools use exemplars to report to parents and whānau by discussing children's achievement and progress in relation to the National Exemplars.

See also: Assessment

F

Family grouped class or whānau

- In this kind of class children are grouped together in a wide range of age groups. There might be children aged from five up to 11 or 12 years old in the same classroom. A school could have a number of family grouped classrooms. A family group could be in an open plan or a single cell classroom.
- In a good family grouped classroom five year olds are not isolated but are included in all activities. Older children and new entrants interact and cooperate.
- Expect to see all the characteristics of a good classroom with the additional advantage to five year olds of learning alongside children who are more advanced.

*See also: Open plan or variable space, Single cell classroom,
Section 4 – Five Year Olds in the Classroom*

Fees and donations

- The Education Act 1989 states that “... every person who is not a foreign student is entitled to free enrolment and free education at any state school during the period beginning on the person’s 5th birthday and ending on the 1st day of January after the person’s 19th birthday”.
- Most schools ask parents to pay an activity fee. In a state school the payment of such a fee cannot be enforced.
- Good schools make it clear to parents that fees are voluntary donations. They use activity fees to provide additional school resources such as library books, computers and sports equipment.
- An integrated school can require parents to pay attendance dues. Money raised in this way must be used for land, buildings and other school facilities owned by the proprietors of the school. Integrated schools may also ask for the voluntary payment of activity fees.
- Find out about the voluntary school fees or donations and attendance dues for each school you are considering.

See also: Integrated school, Private school

Full primary school

- A full primary school teaches children from new entrants to the end of Year 8 after which students go to a secondary school. Most rural primary schools are full primary schools.
- Very small schools with three or fewer teachers are often full primary schools. In these schools, the principal also spends some time during the week teaching in a classroom. If there is more than one teacher the new entrants or five year olds are not usually in the principal’s class.
- For a five year old there is little difference between a contributing school and a larger full primary school.
- Read the descriptions of composite classes in Section 4 – **Five Year Olds in the Classroom**.

See also: Contributing school, Composite school, Correspondence School, Homeschooling

G

Gifted children

- Some children, sometimes referred to as ‘gifted’, have special needs that arise from special abilities. For example they may be very musical or be able to speak more than one language.
- Schools are now required to identify students who are ‘gifted and talented’ and to “develop and implement teaching and learning strategies to address their needs.”
- If you have a gifted child, discuss his or her needs with the principal. Ask how the school identifies gifted children and what programmes it has especially for them.

H

Homeschooling

- Parents who choose to teach their children at home instead of at a school must get approval to do so from the Ministry of Education. Homeschooling is also called ‘an exemption from enrolment.’
- Good homeschooling requires a high level of commitment from parents and children.
- If you choose to homeschool your child make sure that your child makes as much progress as they would at school. Also ensure that your child has opportunities to interact with other children.

See also: Correspondence School

I

ICT

- At school, children of all ages learn about Information and Communications Technology, or ICT, and how to use information and communications technology in their work in the classroom.
- In good schools children participate in a wide range of ICT activities, such as producing videos, newspapers or newsletters, or staging a school production. Children may also use the internet, computers and computer applications such as word processors, databases, and email.

- A good school has procedures and systems to safeguard your child from unwanted images when he or she is using the internet.
- Find out about the ICT learning expectations in the school and the impact for your child.

See also: Curriculum, Cybersafety and the internet

IEP

- The Individual Education Programme (also known as Individual Education Plan) is developed for children with special education needs. Parents, teachers, specialists and often the child are all involved in developing the programme.
- The IEP outlines children's learning goals and the time in which those goals should be achieved. The programme also includes the resources, monitoring and support, and the evaluation required to enable the child to meet the goals.
- In good schools the IEPs are reviewed at least twice a year.
- If your child has special education needs, talk to the school about the support it will give your child.

Immunisation

- The law requires all schools to collect information on children's immunisation status when they first enrol them in a school. This is so that all children can be kept safe in the event of an outbreak of a disease.
- Parents are not required to immunise their children. However, there is a requirement for a parent to advise the school whether or not their child has been fully immunised. If your child is immunised, you will need to show your child's immunisation certificate.

Integrated curriculum

- Many schools use the term 'integrated curriculum' to describe a way of teaching that includes different aspects of the New Zealand Curriculum in the same lessons.
- Subjects such as science, social studies, technology, and the arts can all be taught relating to a particular theme. These themes can be in individual classrooms, or across the school. For example, studying water conservation could include science, social studies, health, English and technology.
- You can ask your child's teacher how subjects are taught as part of an integrated curriculum and how the teacher makes sure that all areas of the curriculum are covered.

See also: Curriculum

Integrated school

- Integrated schools are generally former private schools that have joined the state education system (they are also known as state integrated schools).
- The proprietors provide the buildings while their operational funding (day-to-day expenses, including teacher salaries) comes from the Government. They are required to follow the New Zealand Curriculum.
- The education provided by state integrated schools is essentially the same as that provided by other state schools although they have the added feature of a special character, usually religious. All Roman Catholic schools are integrated schools. There are integrated schools like Rudolph Steiner or Montessori that base their special character on an educational philosophy.
- Good integrated schools provide high quality teaching and learning programmes within the New Zealand Curriculum with the additional features of their stated special character.
- Find out about the special character of an integrated school and consider its impact on your child.
- Find out if there are any particular restrictions on enrolment.
- Ask about the payment of attendance dues and school fees. An integrated school can require parents to pay attendance dues. Money raised in this way must be used for land, buildings and other school facilities owned by the proprietors of the school. Integrated schools may also ask for the voluntary payment of activity fees.

See also: Fees and donations, State school

J

JOST

- JOST is the Junior Oral Language Screening Tool. Many schools use JOST to identify areas where children need further development with speaking (often referred to as oral language skills).
- In good schools, the classroom teacher uses the results of JOST to plan oral language programmes as required for children. Good schools share this information with parents and whānau.

K

Kaiako

- Kaiako are teachers in Māori immersion classrooms. Most kaiako have undertaken teacher training before they begin to work in schools. They have the specialist skills that are used in teaching in immersion language settings.
- Kaiako use professional judgement in their interactions with children and in the way they manage the learning in the classroom. They have a professional duty to look after the learning needs of children.
- In good kura, kaiako work cooperatively with one another. The child's experiences are coordinated by a team of kaiako who work together on organising good learning experiences for children.
- Take an active interest in all kura activities. You and the kaiako should share responsibility for achieving the educational goals you have for your child. You should expect kaiako to talk about educational ideas with you. You should expect to influence decisions made day to day about your child.

See also: Kura kaupapa Māori, Māori immersion classes, Teachers

Kaiāwhina

- Kaiāwhina work in kura kaupapa Māori and immersion classes or schools to help teachers with children and young people who have special education needs.

See also: Special education, Teacher aides.

Kura kaupapa Māori

- In kura kaupapa Māori the same subjects are taught as in other state schools but te reo Māori (the Māori language) is the language used by teachers and children almost all the day. In 2008 there were 68 state kura kaupapa Māori.
- Kaiako in good kura kaupapa Māori are fluent speakers of te reo Māori and are also able to provide high quality education across all subjects in the curriculum. Good kura kaupapa Māori base every aspect of their operation on tikanga Māori, or Māori principles.

- Expect to find all the characteristics of other good schools in the kura with the addition of full time use of te reo Māori. Find out how you and your whānau will be involved in the day-to-day life of the school. Ask if the kura has any expectations about using te reo Māori in your home. Ask if the kura provides assistance with extending te reo Māori skills for the kura whānau.

See also: Māori immersion classes, Kaiako

L

Learning objectives/learning outcomes

- Achievement objectives are broad statements of what students are expected to know and be able to do in order to show what they have learned. They are the aims or goals of teaching and learning programmes and are described in curriculum statements.
- Good schools set challenging learning objectives for their teaching programmes from these achievement objectives. In good schools teachers have detailed records of each child's progress towards meeting these objectives.
- Ask if discussions and explanations of achievement objectives are included in meetings for parents and prospective parents. Ask what the learning objectives are for your child during the first few months of school.

See also: Assessment, Curriculum, Documents and policies, Curriculum management document

Left-handedness

- Lots of children are left-handed, but many activities are designed in a way that suits those who are right-handed. Good schools make sure that left-handed children are not disadvantaged when they learn to write, use scissors, or play sport. They may provide suitable pens, a left-handed mouse, or even left-handed scissors.
- If your child is left-handed, you can ask the teacher how he or she will be taught to write.

M

Māori immersion classes

- In an immersion class some or all of the curriculum is taught in te reo Māori in that classroom. In 2008 there were 202 schools with bilingual and/or immersion classes.
- In an immersion class tikanga Māori is the base for the whole operation of the class. Children in the immersion class and their teachers have good relationships with the rest of the school, and other classes in the school also have a Māori component in their regular programme.
- Consider the descriptions of good new entrant classes in Section 4 – **Five Year Olds in the Classroom** and expect to find all of these features in the immersion class with the addition of te reo Māori.

See also: Kura kaupapa Māori, Kaiako

N

New entrant

- In big schools five year olds usually begin school in a new entrant class or group with a specialist new entrant teacher. Because most children start school on their fifth birthday the new entrant class can grow from day to day.
- In small schools new entrants have special programmes within the composite group.
- In a good school children move from the new entrant class or on to more advanced programmes according to their progress.
- Ask how long your child is likely to remain in a new entrant class or group. Ask when you can expect a first report on your child's learning needs and progress.
- Ask how you can support your child's education.

See also: Assessment

NumP

- Many schools use the Numeracy Project (called NumP and rhymes with ‘bump’). You will know because teachers in these schools often talk about their NumP programmes when children are learning about numbers. The project aims to improve children’s achievement in mathematics by improving classroom teaching at all levels. Children of all ages are involved in NumP programmes, including the five year olds.
- Children in Māori immersion classes may be involved in Te Poutama Tau.
- You may also hear teachers in these schools refer to NumPA (rhymes with ‘bumper’). The Numeracy Project Assessment (NumPA) is an integral part of the new teaching approach. Teachers use the assessment as part of their regular classroom teaching. They group children according to ability and use activities that help children’s strategy and knowledge development.
- Good schools hold open days and parent education evenings to explain NumP and NumPA to parents.
- Ask how you can help your child to learn about numbers at home.

See also: Assessment, SEA, JOST, Exemplars, PIPS, Six year nets, asTTle

O

Open plan or variable space

- An open plan or variable space school or classroom is designed so that several classes of children and several teachers use a group of spaces in a variety of ways. Teaching and learning is organised so that there are different groupings at different times of the day.
- In a good open plan classroom the available space is used in a flexible way and children have a planned programme in which they interact with different teachers at different times of each day. Teachers working in a good open plan room cooperate in their planning and assessment of children’s learning, and all the teachers in the syndicate or group of teachers know all the children. There are opportunities in a good open plan classroom for children to learn at a higher level in subjects they are good at and to catch up easily in areas where they have difficulty.

- Observe an open plan classroom in action during an ordinary school day. Expect to see a variety of large and small group spaces being used. Children should be industriously and calmly absorbed in their own learning. Consider whether the open plan classroom makes maximum use of the special abilities and different strengths of teachers to benefit your child. Read the example of an open plan classroom in Section 4 – **Five Year Olds in the Classroom**.

See also: Composite class, Single cell classroom

ORRS

- The Ongoing and Reviewable Resourcing Schemes (ORRS) are extra funding and staffing provided to schools for students who have the highest level of special educational need. About one percent of the school-aged population meet the Ministry of Education’s criteria for support under ORRS.
- Parents of these children are likely to have come into contact with the Ministry of Education: Group Special Education, through early childhood services or medical specialists (doctors, physiotherapists, psychologists or occupational therapists).
- If you think your child is likely to be eligible for ORRS funding talk to the teacher and principal, and the person in charge of special programmes in the school about the special care you can expect the school to provide for your child.

See also: Special education, SENCO

P

Parents and caregivers

- Parents and caregivers have an important relationship with the school. On their children’s behalf they choose a school and have a right to expect that the school will provide good education for their child.
- Good schools make parents welcome at school, value their input and pay attention to their preferences. Good schools include fathers, mothers and grandparents in classroom activities and organise occasions when parents can discuss educational issues with teachers and other parents.
- Observe the school’s inclusion of parents in the day-to-day life of the school. Expect the principal, board and teachers to treat you as a partner in your child’s education.

See also: Board of trustees, Principal, Teachers

PIPS

- The Performance Indicators in Primary Schools or PIPS is a CD-ROM based programme designed to assess five-year-old children entering school. The assessment tasks include a numbers task, reading and writing, and retelling something they have heard.
- Schools use a whole range of different assessment programmes and your child's teacher will be able to tell you about the ones used in your child's school, and if PIPS is one of them.
- Good schools will explain the process to you and will tell you how your child got on with the tasks.

See also: Assessment

Principal

- The principal manages the school day to day according to the policy directions of the board of trustees. The principal is responsible for ensuring that teachers are doing their job well and that children are learning and are safe at school.
- A good principal has a major influence on the quality of education provided for the children in the school. A good principal is able to tell you what children are expected to learn and is ready and available to discuss your child with you before and after enrolment. A good principal is interested in your hopes and aspirations for your child and concerned for your child's educational progress and general well-being.
- Talk with the principal of the school and expect full answers to your questions.

See also: Board of trustees, Teachers

Private school

- Fully or provisionally registered private schools are funded mainly from parents' fees and donations and their land and buildings are the property of the owner.
- Private schools must have suitable premises, staffing, equipment and curriculum and must provide tuition of a standard no lower than that given by an equivalent state school. They may, however, design their own curriculum. ERO inspects private schools every three years so that they can maintain their registration.
- A good private school should be able to explain what it offers that is different from other schools. It may have a different curriculum and different classroom arrangements and may include elements not usually part of a state school programme.

- Ask the principal about the distinctive features of the school. Ask about special features of the curriculum, classrooms, teachers and grounds and buildings. Get a clear statement of the compulsory fees and any voluntary donations expected.

See also: Fees and donations, State school

Prospectus or information booklet

- A prospectus or booklet of information for parents is produced by a school to provide information about the school.
- A good prospectus is up to date with current information. It is also likely to include a statement about the school's mission or goals, names of staff members, names of board of trustee members, a year calendar of school events like sports days, daily starting and closing times, dates of board meetings, holiday dates, the complaints procedure, lunch ordering systems, uniform and school rules.
- Ask for written information like this about the school as one of the first steps in choosing a school.

See also: Charter, Documents and policies

R

Reading Recovery

- Reading Recovery is a special teaching programme designed to give help in reading for six year olds experiencing difficulty with reading.
- In good schools teaching reading in the early years is successful for most children and special programmes like Reading Recovery are arranged for children having difficulty. All children should continue to be taught the reading and study skills they need throughout their schooling.
- Find out about the school's overall success in teaching reading. In classrooms, look for children selecting books from classroom displays and settling to read them, and for children who are absorbed in their reading and interested in browsing among books.

See also: Curriculum, Running records, Six year nets

Reports

- Most schools provide reports on children's progress both orally and in writing.
- Expect regular feedback on your child's learning. Good schools provide parents with regular written feedback on their child's learning for the year. This information may be shared in a range of forms such as school reports, student portfolios, learning logs and sample books. Good schools give parents regular opportunities to discuss their child's progress.
- Expect to discuss your child's progress with the teacher. After about one month the school should be able to report your child's learning needs.

See also: Assessment

Resource and itinerant teachers

- Resource teachers and itinerant teachers are specially trained teachers who travel to different schools, helping teachers to support children's education. They specialise in a variety of subjects, such as music or mathematics or reading.

Resources

- Classroom materials such as books, paint, paper and equipment are called resources.
- In good schools the resources are clean, up to date, in good order, stored in a tidy manner and easily accessible to children.
- Look for a wide range of books, interesting equipment and materials in all classrooms. Children should be using them.

See also: Displays

Roll size

- School size is a factor that may influence parental choice. In New Zealand about 500 primary schools have fewer than 50 children. There are about 200 big primary schools with more than 400 children. Contributing schools tend to be larger than full primary schools.
- The principals of most small primary schools may spend several hours a week teaching – the number of hours depends on the size of the school. In the smallest schools the principal has a greater teaching load with responsibility for a particular class.

- Good small schools have established strategies to ensure that children are exposed to a wide variety of choices and experiences. Good big schools have developed strategies to make a new entrant feel secure and safe within the larger group.
- Look at the classrooms used by new entrants. In a small school they share the room with children who have been at school for two or three years. There is a variety of classroom arrangements for new entrants in big schools. Read the examples of good practice in the final section of this booklet to help you judge the significance of what you see.

See also: Open plan or variable space, Single cell classroom

Rules

- School rules define what is expected of students and teachers.
- Good schools have few rules. They are expressed as what should be done rather than what is prohibited. Children understand the reason for good school rules and find it easy to comply with them. Good school rules focus on the positive, encouraging all children to develop their self-management, problem-solving and communication skills.
- Look at the school rules and find out what the punishments are if children disobey them. Consider whether your child will understand the rules and feel secure at school.
- Larger schools may have separate areas of the playground designated for different age groups. Often this is to allow for the range of physical and emotional capabilities children of various ages may have. Ask about rules that may relate to the playground areas and consider the impact for your child.

See also: Bullying, Complaints, Discipline

Running records

- Running records are one of the ways many teachers check up on children's reading development. The teacher records how the child reads each word, showing the details of mistakes, changes made according to context clues and the way the child goes back to make sense of a phrase.
- Good teachers use running records among a range of other assessment tools to analyse individual children's progress and learning needs.
- Ask when the school provides feedback to parents about their children's reading progress and learning needs.

See also: Assessment

S

SEA

- The SEA (School Entry Assessment) is the standardised assessment procedure used to collect information on the skills, knowledge and understandings of five-year-old children entering school. Children are asked to do tasks that involve numbers, reading and writing, and telling stories they have heard.
- Good schools will explain the process to you and will tell you how your child got on with the tasks.

See also: Assessment

School websites

- Many schools have websites where information about the school can be viewed. Children may have input into the design or contents of web pages. Some schools display school newsletters, the charter, or important policies on the school website.
- Good schools ensure information on the school website is kept up to date, and is relevant to the school.
- Find out whether schools you are interested in have websites, and if possible visit the websites more than once.

See also: Prospectus or information booklet, Charter

SENCO

- Many schools have a SENCO (Special Education Needs Coordinator) responsible for coordinating the various special programmes the school may have in place for children.
- If your child has special education needs you should talk to the principal about this when you are thinking about enrolling your child at a school. Ask to talk to the SENCO.
- Good schools often have IEP (Individual Education Plan) meetings between the student, parents, specialists and all staff involved in the learning and teaching programme with the child.
- Ask the principal or teachers who coordinates special programmes in the school, and how they provide feedback to parents.

See also: Special education, ORRS, IEP

Single cell classroom

- A single cell classroom has about 15 to 25 students and one teacher.
- Good single cell new entrant classrooms have all the characteristics of other good classrooms: children are absorbed in their learning, there are books and equipment which children use, and children's work is on the walls.
- Look at the new entrant classroom. Look for evidence that children are contented and stimulated in this classroom.

See also: Displays, Open plan or variable space, Resources

Single sex, girls-only and boys-only schools

- Single sex education is more common at the secondary level. Some private schools are single-sex schools and have primary classes.

See also: Private school

Six year nets

- Six year nets are a comprehensive assessment of each six-year-old child's progress in reading and writing at the end of the first year at school.
- Good schools explain the process to parents. They make careful and thorough assessments of all children when they reach their sixth birthday.
- Find out how the school gives parents the information it gathers about children's reading progress.

See also: Assessment, Curriculum, Learning objectives/learning outcomes, Running records

Special education

- Special education is the provision of extra assistance, adapted programmes or learning environments, or specialised equipment or materials. Children with a disability, learning difficulty or behavioural difficulty may receive special education when they have been identified as needing alternative or additional resources to those usually provided in a school.
- When children with special education needs take part in a school's regular classes it is called mainstreaming. They may also be in a special class or unit within the school. Some special education is based in separate schools.
- Children with special education needs have the same rights to enrol and receive education at a state school as other children.

- Good schools provide programmes to meet the particular needs of all students. They are open and welcoming to all children whatever their ability. They organise support for children with special needs using specialist staff, advisers and teacher aides. All children benefit from the experience of learning alongside children with special needs.
- Discuss your child's special education needs with the principal and with the specialist from the Ministry of Education, Group: Special Education.

See also: SENCO, ORRS, Section 5 – Useful Addresses – Ministry of Education, Group: Special Education

State school

- State schools are funded by the Government and are required to follow the New Zealand Curriculum. Most New Zealand schools with primary classes are state schools.

See also: Fees and donations, Integrated school

Subjects

- Eight learning areas or subjects are included in the New Zealand Curriculum, expected to be fully implemented in 2010:
 - English
 - Mathematics
 - Science
 - Technology
 - Social Sciences
 - The Arts
 - Health and Physical Well-being
 - Learning Languages
- Curriculum statements produced for these learning areas outline what should be taught in more detail.
- In good schools all children, including five year olds, are involved in learning programmes in reading, writing and other language skills as well as mathematics, science, social studies, technology, art, music, health and physical education.
- Ask the principal or new entrant teacher what your child will be learning in the first few years at school.

See also: Curriculum, Learning objectives/learning outcomes

Syndicate teams

- Many teachers in larger primary schools work together in a group of classes commonly called syndicates, pods or teams. Each syndicate or team should have at least one experienced or senior teacher as a leader.
- Good schools have strong and cooperative teams of teachers who also work with other syndicates within the school to ensure that children's education is coordinated. The syndicate plans together for a group of classes, and teachers support and monitor one another's work.
- Find out who is the leader of the junior syndicate. You may want to discuss your child's progress with the syndicate leader as well as the class teacher.

See also: Teachers

T

Teacher aides

- Teacher aides work in schools helping teachers. Often they work with children who have special education needs. In kura kaupapa Māori and te reo Māori immersion classes, they are also known as kaiāwhina.
- In good schools teacher aides work alongside the classroom teacher.

See also: Special education, Kaiāwhina

Teachers

- Teachers must be registered with the New Zealand Teachers Council. They have undertaken teacher training before they begin to work in schools. Pre-employment training, and ongoing in-service training and experience establish the specialist skills that are customary in teaching.
- Teachers exercise professional judgement in their interactions with children and in the way they manage the learning in the classroom. They have a professional obligation to address the learning needs of children.
- In good schools teachers work cooperatively with one another. The child's experiences at school are coordinated by a well-managed staff of teachers who work together on curriculum development and organising learning experiences for the benefit of children.
- Take an active interest in all school activities. You and the school should share responsibility for achieving the educational goals you have for your child. You should expect teachers to talk to you about their educational ideas with you and you should expect to influence decisions made day to day about your child.

See also: Board of trustees, Principal, Teachers

Type of school

- Most schools for five-year-old children are either full primary schools or contributing schools. Parents will not always have a choice of types of school. For example in rural areas where there are no intermediate schools, there are usually no contributing schools.

See also: Composite school, Contributing school, Full primary school, Homeschooling, Integrated school

4

Five Year Olds in the Classroom

The features of good classrooms are similar in all schools. Good classrooms have good natural lighting and ventilation and are clean, tidy and uncluttered. Equipment and books are stored tidily where children can find what they need themselves. They have current displays of children's work. All children have a place of their own in the room where they can store their belongings. In the corridor or cloakroom the coat hooks are clearly labelled with children's names.

Good classrooms are not silent, although you will neither hear the teacher's voice raised nor children shouting. As much of what happens in a good junior classroom is to do with language, there is a great deal of talking to go with all the subjects in the curriculum, whether it be reading, social studies, technology or something else. Teachers talk with the children and the children are confident that what they say is of value to the teacher and to their classmates. Children listen and respond to one another's contributions to discussions.

In good schools children neither drift around the classroom nor do they have to wait while other children have their turn. They do not have to queue or line up or passively watch other children's learning activities. Children themselves put equipment away, wash paint brushes and clean up. They respect one another's activities, they help one another and they share ideas and responsibilities.

English and Māori, as well as the other languages of children in the classroom, are used throughout the day.

In good junior classrooms you will see a range of the following:

- clear, bold, enlarged texts
- children's work captioned so that children can read around the walls
- enlarged poem cards
- alphabet cards
- charts of songs with pictures
- Māori language greetings and basic words pinned to displays or the door so that they are visible to children
- stand-alone bulletin boards dividing the room into corners or interesting nooks and crannies
- low group tables

- chairs of a size to match tables
- places for children to store personal belongings
- low shelving units with easy access for children
- labelled boxes of equipment
- pot plants with captions showing the name and needs for growth
- book displays
- an open space for all children to sit on the floor
- big books resting on an easel or hanging from a rack
- taskboards to encourage independent learning
- playing cards, Hundreds boards and mathematics equipment
- writing area
- science area
- library area
- listening post with headphones, a CD player or tape deck out ready for use
- compact discs or tapes and books that match the tapes
- wet or painting area
- music corner with instruments
- sports equipment
- imaginative play clothing, masks and toys
- computers, printers and CD ROMs

Different classroom arrangements

In a big school your five year old might be in a class of five year olds, or a class of the youngest 25 children in the school. Some big schools have composite classes for all junior children and your child might be in a class with five and six year olds.

In small schools your five year old might be in a class with five, six, seven and eight year olds. In a one-teacher school the class is likely to have students from five to 12 years of age.

Whatever the arrangement you can expect the teacher to teach your child at the appropriate level.

Some examples of good classrooms

The following descriptions of good classrooms give some examples of what you might expect to see when you are invited to visit a new entrant classroom.

Specific learning activities are described in these descriptions. You should not necessarily expect to see these exact activities in your own classroom observations. They are simply an indication of the kind of things five year olds do in good schools. Each school is free to decide its own learning programmes to meet the learning needs of its children.

A Single Cell Classroom for New Entrants

Some drawings and one-sentence descriptions of the size of trees around the school are on the walls. Books about trees and about their height and measurement are on the table below. Two computers stand on low tables in a corner. In another corner there is a sink and a bench. There are paint jars and brushes on shelves. Large boxes of equipment are stored under the windows and colourful books on various themes are displayed in different parts of the room.

In the room there are 15 children and one teacher. There is lots of talk but nobody is shouting or interfering with anyone else's activity. The tone of the room is contented and purposeful.

All the children in the room are busily at work. Six children are sitting in pairs on the floor measuring blocks, discussing the measurements and sorting the blocks into length order. Four children are sorting coloured blocks into sets according to their shape. The rest of the class are with the teacher measuring classroom furniture and attaching labels showing the measurements.

The teacher moves to a low chair. The children gather around and, as they settle down to sit on the floor, the teacher talks with each of them about what they have just been doing. When they are all settled she introduces a large colourful book, which is on the easel beside her. The children look at the picture on the cover and discuss what they think the book will be about. The book is a story poem. The children then read the book together with the teacher helping them to work out new words from the context, rhyme, rhythm and pictures.

In a single cell classroom the teacher may work with the whole class.

Whole Class Lessons

The teacher stands or sits close to the class so that all children can be seen, and can see the teacher. The teacher does not raise his/her voice. Routines necessary to complete the lesson successfully are reinforced (taking turns, asking a question, not interrupting others or calling out).

Interest is aroused in the lesson through, for example, some large pictures, a visitor, a real life exhibit, a story or an object a child has found.

The purpose of a lesson such as “The Life Cycle of a Butterfly” is shared with the children. The lesson is linked with previous learning.

The teachers prompts the children:

Remember when we went on a nature walk and we saw something interesting near the swan plant in the garden by the principal’s office?

Who can tell me what it was?

Today Tracey has brought along a chrysalis for us to keep in our classroom.

What can you tell me about a chrysalis?

During the lesson the teacher uses prompts to focus children’s thinking:

What do you think might happen next?

How will the chrysalis change?

What will the butterfly look like when it comes out?

What will it do next?

What will it eat?

As the lesson develops, the teacher might involve children in using a range of senses. Often time is provided for a range of physical activities (such as painting, drawing, cutting, writing, singing, pasting) and verbal activities (talking, listening, asking and answering questions).

Instructions for activities are short and clear. They are reinforced and checked before activities commence:

Who can tell me what I have asked you to do?

Children carry out learning activities as individuals, with partners and in small groups. The teacher moves around the class ensuring that children understand what they are doing and whether or not they are on task and actively participating. The room is well organised and resources and equipment needed by children are readily available.

At the end of activities the teacher brings the children back together and an opportunity is provided for children to share what they have learnt and to reinforce learning related to the main purpose of the lesson. Sharing involves reading, talking, explaining and showing what has been done. The teacher increasingly involves reluctant children in this sharing.

The teacher concludes the lesson by focusing children's thinking on the purpose of the lesson and drawing together the children's understanding about the life cycle of a butterfly.

At the end of lessons, teachers often read to the children, or children and teachers sing a song or play a game.

An Open Plan Classroom

The classroom is a large space made up of a series of alcoves and bays around a central open area. Some doors open onto enclosed terraces with outdoor furniture and attractive planting. Parts of the room are carpeted but there are also wet areas where spilt paint and paste can be cleaned up easily. Displays of children's work and learning equipment define the purpose of each of these learning centres. The whole area is bright, open, uncluttered, colourful and interesting.

Sets of tables and chairs are clustered in different parts of the room. On the tables are containers of pencils, pens, rulers and different types of paper. There are computers in three parts of the classroom. Boxes of books are labelled and wall displays have children's names by their work and relate to activities taking place in the classroom. There are dictionaries and word lists, wall stories and charts.

There are about 100 five and six year old children and five teachers, all of whom are busy, and there is a busy hum of talk and activity.

There are 15 new entrants in the class. Five of them are working with a teacher and some of the older children in one of the wet areas. They have a tub of water and some plasticene, scraps of wood and plastic, pieces of different types of paper and leaves. They discuss their predictions about whether an object will float, then try it out and record their findings on a chart. One of the five year olds has formed a boat from the plasticene but he thinks it will sink because the same piece of plasticene did earlier. There is great interest when the plasticene boat floats.

Some of the five year olds are in the reading area where the teacher has helped them to select their own books. Some children are reading to each other and some have headphones and are listening to a taped story.

In one of the bigger alcoves a large group of older children is listening to a former student of the school who has just returned from the Olympic Games with a medal. Only one of the new entrants has decided to join this group and is sitting rapt in the front row.

A Family-Grouped Classroom

Twenty children including two new entrants are in the classroom. One new entrant is sitting at a computer singing with two older children as the words of a waiata appear on the screen. The other is writing a story at a table with a group of older children who are helping when new words are needed.

Both five year olds are fully involved in learning groups. They are not isolated or separated from the other children. Their named work is on the walls among the work of their older classmates. The children are proud of their own work and that of their classmates.

English, Mathematics and Science in a Composite Junior Classroom

Display and pinboard space is covered with attractive and eye-catching displays of children's art and language work including illustrated stories and poems. Captions printed clearly and boldly by the teacher are displayed on or under children's work. Children's pictures and three-dimensional cardboard models hang from wire and hoops from the ceiling.

English or language lesson

All the children are seated in front of a small whiteboard set on an easel. The teacher is seated on a low chair beside the whiteboard facing the children. The children have just finished discussing with their partners their trip to the zoo. The partners are five year olds working with six and seven year olds.

The teacher then asks the children about their experiences at the zoo, what they enjoyed, learned, saw, felt, smelled and heard. Children are called upon to share their ideas with the whole class. The other children listen with interest. The teacher encourages shy children to participate by prompting responses. The teacher has higher expectations of the six and seven year olds and teacher asks questions that demand more sophisticated responses from the older children.

Activity

The teacher and children decide to write a shared story about the lion. The teacher writes, asking questions like:

Who has an interesting way to start the story?

What happens next?

The teacher encourages a range of descriptive words, prompts children about sequence and simple punctuation, asks for the beginning and end of the story and sometimes deliberately makes a mistake so that children can identify errors and correct them.

The teacher includes occasional re-reading of the story for sense and improvements. All children's contributions are received positively. Sometimes the teacher says:

What else could we say? or

Who could think of another word that is interesting?

The older children come up to the white board and write words and help with punctuation. The younger children write in a capital letter or a full stop.

The teacher focuses on aspects of the text. For example:

Who can point to the sentence about the lion's coat?

Who can show me the sentence that describes the lion's roar?

Group activities

The older children, who are fluent readers, research books about zoo animals in the library and bring them back to the class. Some use the index to determine if the book has enough information about lions.

The early readers listen to a taped story about animals and read along with the tape in a matching book.

The new entrants are with the teacher reading a big picture book about a lion. The captions help the children to appreciate the relationship between the text and pictures. They predict what happens next, discuss the pictures to work out words, talk about words that start with the same sound and those that rhyme. Following this the children find animal pictures from magazines.

All children return to the whiteboard and briefly share what they have been doing. Mixed groups of three write captions for the pictures the youngest children have cut from magazines. The teacher moves around the room, helping and encouraging. Children return to the white board to share their work, reading out their captions and talking about their pictures. Work is put on the wall for display and the children read around the room.

Mathematics

The mathematics lesson begins with a shared activity. All children sit in front of the white board while the teacher reads a picture book to the whole class about measurement. The teacher focuses children on looking and listening to words about measurement such as: tallest, taller than, tall, short, shorter than, shortest, centimetre, metre and millimetre. The children and teacher briefly discuss the words, the teacher writing chosen words on the white board as they talk about them.

A task board with cut-out symbols shows what activities each group of children is to undertake today. The teacher points, explains the activities, talks about who will do what and how and when. The task board shows that two of the three groups work independently while the teacher works with one group. The teacher checks that all children know what they are expected to do and when they move to the designated areas, one group remains with the teacher.

The older children in one group have a worksheet to complete. They measure in centimetres the length of various classroom objects with 30 centimetre rulers. Working in pairs they write their findings in the appropriate spaces on a worksheet prepared by the teacher before the lesson.

The middle group has a crate of mathematical activities in plastic bags. Today they work independently. The activities reinforce mathematical concepts they have previously discovered and learned. They select a bag and, following instructions in the activity bag, complete the activity. Children work in small groups and swap bags on completion. The teacher observes the general behaviour of the group as she/he takes a lesson with other children.

The lesson with the youngest children involves a great deal of talking about measurement. In particular they discuss the children's own heights using terms such as tall, tallest, taller, short, shorter and shortest. Following discussion the children arrange themselves into order of height and the teacher asks each child to give the teacher a statement about their own height in relation to the height of their neighbour or two other children. Then they cut out a set of photocopied teddy bear pictures and glue them onto a sheet of paper in order of height.

The group of older children discusses the concept of millimetres with the teacher. They talk about the use of millimetres in building industry and rain gauges. Children take the classroom rain gauge from the science cupboard and put it onto the school fence, set up a roster and prepare a chart to measure the amount of rain each day.

While they prepare the chart (a week each), the teacher goes to the independent activity group and talks through what they have been doing.

The class is brought together, they sing a measuring song and all children stand in a line in height order.

Science

The science lesson begins with a whole class activity. The teacher leads the discussion, encouraging predictions and hypotheses from the children.

Older children work with younger children placing iceblocks in a range of different situations around the school: in the sun, in shade, in a fridge and freezer, in a chillybin and on a heater. Within five minutes they observe changes to their iceblocks. Children demonstrate their investigative skills through observation, prediction, comparison and discussion in their small groups.

They return to the class and discuss their observations as a whole class. The teacher's role is to draw out from the children as much discussion as possible. They talk about their personal observations, decide under what conditions the iceblocks melt most quickly and most slowly and note the effects of the various temperatures. The teacher guides the class to make conclusions based on their discoveries.

Tomorrow the lesson will continue. The children will make flavoured iceblocks and check how long it takes for them to freeze and if ice blocks made with hot water freeze more slowly than ice blocks made with cold water.

5 Useful Addresses

Education Review Offices

Corporate Office

Level 1, Sybase House
101 Lambton Quay
Box 2799
Wellington 6140
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482
info@ero.govt.nz

Te Uepū-ā-Motu (Māori Review Services)

Level 1, Sybase House
101 Lambton Quay
Box 2799
Wellington 6140
Phone: 04 499 2489 Fax: 04 499 2482
erotu@ero.govt.nz

Auckland (Area 1)

Level 5, URS Centre
13–15 College Hill
Ponsonby
Box 7219
Wellesley Street
Auckland 1010
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 09 373 3421
auckland@ero.govt.nz

Moana Pasefika

c/o Auckland Office
Phone: 09 377 1331 Fax: 09 373 3421
auckland@ero.govt.nz

Hamilton (Area 2)

Floor 4, ASB Building
214 Collingwood Street
Private Bag 3095 WMC
Hamilton 3240
Phone: 07 838 1898 Fax: 07 838 1893
hamilton@ero.govt.nz

Rotorua (Area 2)

Floor 5, Zens Centre
41 Arawa Street
Box 335
Rotorua 3040
Phone: 07 348 2228 Fax: 07 348 1498
rotorua@ero.govt.nz

Napier (Area 3)

Level 1, 43 Station Street
Box 742
Napier 4140
Phone: 06 835 8143 Fax: 06 835 8578
napier@ero.govt.nz

Wanganui (Area 3)

249 Victoria Avenue
Box 4023
Wanganui 4541
Phone: 06 345 4091 Fax: 06 345 7207
wanganui@ero.govt.nz

Wellington (Area 4)

Floor 8, Southmark Building
203–209 Willis Street
Box 27 002
Marion Square
Wellington 6141
Phone: 04 381 6800 Fax: 04 381 6801
wellington@ero.govt.nz

Nelson (Area 4)

Floor 2, 241 Hardy Street
Box 169
Nelson 7040
Phone: 03 546 8513 Fax: 03 546 2259
nelson@ero.govt.nz

Christchurch (Area 5)

Floor 4, Pyne Gould Corp Building
233 Cambridge Terrace
Box 25 102
Victoria Street
Christchurch 8144
Phone: 03 365 5860 Fax: 03 366 7524
christchurch@ero.govt.nz

Dunedin (Area 5)

Floor 9, John Wickliffe House
Princes Street
Box 902
Dunedin 9054
Phone: 03 479 2619 Fax: 03 479 2614
dunedin@ero.govt.nz

www.ero.govt.nz

Other agencies

Ministry of Education

Private Box 1666

National Office, Level 1, St Paul's Square,

45 Pipitea Street, Wellington

Phone: 0-4-473 5544 Fax: 0-4-499 1327

New Zealand Correspondence School

11 Portland Crescent, Thorndon, Wellington

Phone: 0-4-473 6841 Fax: 0-4-471 2406

Useful websites

Education Review Office

www.ero.govt.nz

Ministry of Education

www.minedu.govt.nz

edCentre Portal

for web-based government education information

www.edcentre.govt.nz

Te Kete Ipurangi

www.tki.org.nz

The Internet Safety Group

www.netsafe.org.nz

Team-Up

www.teamup.co.nz

