

**Implementation of the  
New Zealand Curriculum: Synthesis  
of Research & Evaluation**

**Dr Sandie Schagen  
Ministry of Education**

**ISBN: 978-0-478-36738-6**

**ISBN: 978-0-478-36739-3 (web)**

**RMR-963**

**© Ministry of Education, New Zealand 2011**

Research reports are available on the Ministry of Education's website Education Counts:  
[www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications](http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications).

# Table of Contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Documents included .....	1
1.2 Structure of the report .....	2
<b>2. Schools' readiness to use the New Zealand Curriculum to develop a school curriculum .....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1 2006-07 .....	3
2.2 2008-09 .....	4
<b>3. Professional development .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1 Organisation of PD .....	9
3.2 Quantity and quality .....	10
3.3 Collaborative PD .....	11
3.4 Content of PD .....	11
3.5 Support needed .....	11
<b>4. Community engagement .....</b>	<b>13</b>
4.1 Student voice .....	13
4.2 Parents/whānau .....	14
4.3 Māori/Pasifika .....	15
4.4 The wider community .....	15
<b>5. The process of implementation .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>6. Factors influencing implementation .....</b>	<b>21</b>
6.1 Factors supporting implementation .....	21
6.2 Factors hindering implementation .....	23
<b>7. Summary and conclusions .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>27</b>



# 1. Introduction

The revised New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) was launched in November 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2007), following a lengthy period of trialling and consultation, which included the publication of a draft version in 2006. Schools were required to give full effect to the curriculum by February 2010. Their progress has been monitored using evidence reported by the Education Review Office (ERO) and research teams commissioned by the Ministry of Education to explore the process and stages of preparation, including a University of Auckland team (the ‘MECI’ study) and a combined New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) and University of Waikato team (the ‘CIES’ study). This paper synthesizes findings from these reports, and other relevant documents. Reports used are listed in the references (page 29).

## 1.1 Documents included

It is important to note that the documents included in this synthesis are very different in a number of ways. For example:

- Authorship – included ERO reviewers, professional researchers, School Support Services (SSS) advisers and teacher union officers.
- Purpose – MECI undertook a national evaluation of progress towards implementation; CIES aimed to provide snapshots of the ways in which individual schools went about giving effect to NZC, identifying factors that could support other schools in their ‘journey’.
- Samples – ERO worked in schools being reviewed; MECI drew a stratified random sample, to be representative of all New Zealand schools; CIES selected schools reputed to be ‘early adopters’ of NZC, which could potentially illustrate good practice. Different units of analysis were used across studies, with ERO reporting at the whole school level and MECI reporting at the level of teachers and principals.
- Methodology – MECI carried out surveys (online and paper-based); CIES undertook case studies; ERO methodology included document analysis, interviews and observations
- Timing – surveys and case-study visits were undertaken at different times during 2008 and 2009 (reference is also made to surveys undertaken in 2006 and 2007) and it would be expected that thinking and practice would have developed considerably over this period.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the reports represent different perspectives, and this needs to be borne in mind, as it could help to account for apparent differences in findings. Nevertheless, there does seem to be an overall degree of consistency in themes arising, which makes the task of attempting a synthesis challenging but not impossible.

It is also important to note the inevitable limitations in scope of the findings. The most recent reports are based on research or professional development (PD) activities carried out in the second half of 2009 – before the date by which schools were due to be giving full effect to NZC. Schools’ progress varied considerably, and some schools had no doubt implemented NZC ahead of time. But the goal of NZC (young people who are “*confident, connected, actively involved and lifelong learners*” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p.8)) will take considerable time to realise. The focus of these reports is therefore on the implementation of NZC, and the changes in thinking and/or practice which this may entail.

## **1.2 Structure of the report**

The next chapter summarises findings about schools' readiness to implement the curriculum at various timepoints leading up to February 2010. The following four chapters focus on themes selected because of their prominence in the documents included in this synthesis:

- the professional development needed and undertaken to prepare teachers to implement NZC effectively
- the engagement of students, parents/whānau and the wider community in the process of implementing NZC and designing the school curriculum
- how schools went about implementing NZC – which aspects did they focus on first?
- the factors that had a positive or negative influence on implementation.

The final chapter provides a brief summary of the key points in this report.

### **A note about referencing**

Reports included in this synthesis, or referred to in connection with it, are listed at the end of this paper, together with brief notes on the dating of the research covered. Key reports (notably CIES, MECI and ERO) are referenced frequently throughout, and it was decided not to incorporate full references (names and date) at every mention, as this would be unnecessarily repetitive and would break the flow of the text. Full references are given, however, where wording is quoted directly from a source. In the case of other documents cited, information is not always available to permit full standard referencing.

## 2. Schools' readiness to use the New Zealand Curriculum to develop a school curriculum

### 2.1 2006-07

In 2006, NZCER undertook a national survey of secondary schools (Schagen and Hipkins, 2008)<sup>1</sup>. This was before the release of the draft version of NZC, but work on it had been widely signalled, and at least some of the principals responding to the survey would have been involved in consultations concerning the new curriculum, via their professional associations.

Just over a quarter of the principals said that their school had already implemented the curriculum key competencies, and a further half said that they were considering doing so (see Table 1). More than a third said that they had already implemented a programme in thinking skills, and 44 percent were considering this; 44 percent said they had adopted an inquiry learning approach, and a third were considering it. Teachers gave a similar response regarding inquiry learning, but were more likely than principals to assert that the key competencies, and thinking skills in particular, were already being implemented. Contrary perhaps to expectations, younger teachers (aged below 40) were much less likely to have introduced the key competencies, and a higher proportion said they had not even considered it.

We do not of course know exactly how 2006 respondents would have understood NZC-related terms. Later evidence indicates that understanding tended to evolve and deepen over time, so it may be that those who said they had already implemented e.g. the key competencies in 2006 later came to realise they had not done so in the full sense required by NZC.

The NZCER survey of primary schools<sup>2</sup> took place in 2007, after the draft version of the revised NZC was released, but before the final document was published. A third of the principals said that their school had implemented the key competencies, and just over a half were considering doing so. Two-thirds said they had already adopted an inquiry learning approach, and 60 percent a thinking skills programme. The fact that primary schools were more 'advanced' than secondary schools in this respect could be due to sector differences, but comparison with data from the previous NZCER national survey (undertaken in 2003) indicated a large increase in attention to complex skills and self-awareness of learning which could be linked to the introduction of NZC. Principals of high-decile schools were more likely to report that they already had thinking skills programmes and inquiry learning approaches.

In comparison with principals, primary school teachers reported more progress with implementing the key competencies; almost half (47 percent) said they had already done so. They also reported more progress on thinking skills (65 percent said they already did this), but less on inquiry learning (58 percent).

---

<sup>1</sup> Four questionnaires were designed, for principals, teachers, trustees and parents. Responses were received from 194 principals, 818 teachers, 278 trustees and 708 parents.

<sup>2</sup> Responses were received from 196 principals, 912 teachers, 329 trustees and 754 parents.

**Table 1: Curriculum priorities in 2006/07**

	Secondary (2006)		Primary (2007)	
	Principals	Teachers	Principals	Teachers
<b>Key Competencies</b>				
• Already have	27	39	34	47
• Considering	50	33	52	39
<b>Thinking Skills</b>				
• Already have	38	59	60	65
• Considering	44	27	29	27
<b>Inquiry Learning</b>				
• Already have	44	47	68	58
• Considering	34	32	26	32

Source: NZCER national surveys.

Primary school teachers were also asked for their views on the likely impact of the revised NZC. Half thought it would help them to integrate different curriculum areas and skills development, and almost as many (47 percent) thought it would allow them to focus on fewer things. However, 30 percent felt that it would not make much difference to what they were already doing, and 20 percent were unsure.

A quarter of the primary school parents surveyed had heard of NZC (one third of these worked in the education sector) but the majority were unsure about its likely impact (34 percent), or were suspending judgement (31 percent). Twenty-two percent thought it would enrich learning, while seven percent did not see that it would really change things.

## 2.2 2008-09

Evidence for this period comes from three main sources, MECI, ERO and NZEI/PPTA, in addition to the NZCER 2009 national survey of secondary schools<sup>3</sup>, and the SSS Milestone 3 reports for 2009.<sup>4</sup>

### Preparation for implementation

A national evaluation of the implementation of the curriculum was undertaken by the University of Auckland. The project, *Monitoring and Evaluating Curriculum Implementation (MECI)*, comprised four surveys of a random stratified sample of schools, two web-based (August 2008 and November 2009) and two paper-based (November 2008 and November 2009). The number of schools responding in 2008 was 230 for the online (August) survey and 221 for the paper-based (November) survey. In 2009 the number was higher for the online survey (345), but lower for the paper-based survey (176).

In each case principals were asked to complete a leaders' survey and invite colleagues to complete a teacher questionnaire. Questions overlapped, so reported responses are often combined (principals and teachers). However, it is possible to compare responses, and also to compare findings for the two years. The total number of respondents in 2008 was 579 for the online questionnaire and 2,583 for the paper-based survey; in 2009 the figures were 604 and 1,800

<sup>3</sup> The report of this survey is as yet unpublished. Figures quoted here are based on preliminary findings presented by researchers at a seminar, or included in a paper on *Community Engagement and the New Zealand Curriculum* (NZCER, nd).

<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education purchases professional development services from six SSS providers. This includes professional development to support NZC implementation. SSS providers submit regular milestone reports to the Ministry.



respectively. MECI also undertook 26 focus group sessions with 247 participants, yielding more in-depth responses to complement the survey data.

At the same time, ERO was evaluating schools' readiness to implement the curriculum. They published two reports, the first based on reviews in 43 secondary schools and 141 primary schools in the latter half of 2008, the second based on reviews in 31 secondary schools and 265 primary schools in the first half of 2009. A third report, published in 2010, is based on reviews in 245 schools (211 primary/intermediate, 24 secondary, five special schools and five composite schools) in Terms 3 and 4 of 2009.

In June 2008, the NZEI and the PPTA surveyed principals on their perceptions of support and progress with implementation of NZC. The unions used the same questionnaire, although the PPTA added two further questions on a different topic.

The NZEI/ PPTA surveys provide a picture of initial readiness in mid 2008. Principals were asked how ready they felt they would be for implementation of the curriculum in 2010 (see Table 2). Just over half of the secondary principals said they would be able to implement all aspects at least 'to some extent'. Primary principals may appear to be more confident, but a much higher proportion said that they would be far from ready. It should be noted that the primary percentages sum to more than 100, implying that some principals must have responded in more than one category.

**Table 2: Schools' preparedness (as at June 2008) for implementing the curriculum in 2010**

	Secondary %	Primary %
Will have done in-depth thinking, be able to completely implement all aspects	18	24
Will have done some thinking, be able to implement all aspects to some extent	37	49
Will be ready at surface level, be able to implement to some extent	27	24
Will be far from ready	2	16
No response	17	

Source: NZEI/PPTA surveys.

### Progress from 2008 to 2009

According to MECI, regard for the curriculum, and confidence about implementation, rose between 2008 and 2009 in secondary schools, but by a very small (although statistically significant) amount. There was no change in primary schools, where confidence levels were already higher. There were some very positive individual comments, particularly with reference to its flexibility, the school-based curriculum design aspect, and the pedagogical emphasis. Several welcomed freedom, although some were nervous about the lack of prescription, preferring to have their task more carefully defined. Practices considered important for the implementation of NZC were rated as difficult in 2009 as they had been in 2008 – slightly more so, in fact, possibly because attempts had been made and problems identified.

Principals were asked by MECI whether they had reviewed values, principles, key competencies, learning areas and pedagogy (see Table 3). In 2008, the majority had reviewed the 'front-end' aspects of NZC, and fewer (but still just over half) had reviewed individual learning areas. In 2009, the proportion of principals saying that they had reviewed each of the elements had increased, but the overall pattern was the same. There were clear signs of progress in this respect, but there were still 10-20 percent of schools that had not yet reviewed values, principles or key competencies, 23 percent who had not reviewed pedagogy, and 29 percent who had not reviewed individual learning areas.

**Table 3: Schools having reviewed elements of the New Zealand Curriculum**

Element of NZC reviewed	2008 %	2009 %
Values	80	88
Principles	71	80
Key competencies	69	89
Learning areas	52	71
Pedagogy	66	77

Source: MECI surveys.

Based on evidence from schools reviewed, ERO classified progress on five curriculum elements as not yet begun; begun to review school's curriculum in relation to the NZC; initiating own-school curriculum design; and well advanced with curriculum design. (It should be noted that their five elements were not identical with MECI's; they included vision but not pedagogy.) Each school was then placed on an overall scale of readiness for implementation: not yet preparing, some preparation, well under way and well prepared (ready). In their first report (referring to schools reviewed in the second half of 2008), ERO judged that 44 percent of secondary schools were at least 'well under way' with implementation, compared with 39 percent of primary schools.

In ERO's judgement both primary and secondary schools reviewed in the first half of 2009 were more advanced in terms of readiness to implement the curriculum than those reviewed in 2008. Preparation was at least 'well under way' in 65 percent of 2009 secondary schools, compared with 44 percent in 2008. This indicates considerable progress, after a time interval of only six months. A similar increase was seen in primary schools (from 39 to 56 percent).

In their third (2010) report, ERO was even more positive. Based on information collected during their reviews, they concluded that 13 percent of the schools were already giving full effect to NZC, and 63 percent had made good progress towards implementation. In other cases, processes were evident in individual classrooms but not formalised school-wide. Very few schools had not yet begun to give effect to NZC. Moreover, ERO noted that *'Apathy and resistance were generally less apparent, and in many schools, curriculum change had gained a momentum that carried staff forward with enthusiasm and commitment'* (ERO, 2010, p.17).

It may appear that what ERO found from school reviews was more positive than what teachers and principals reported to MECI. Comparison is difficult however, because of the differences in samples, in questions asked and in method of analysis. ERO provided details of individual curriculum components only in their first report, so it is not possible to make the kind of comparison that is shown in Table 3, based on the MECI data. Between late 2008 and early 2009 they note only overall progress, and report a substantial increase. But MECI also found a substantial increase in the proportion of principals reporting that some curriculum components had been reviewed, and where the increase is smaller it may reflect the fact that a high rating in 2008 meant less scope for improvement.

School Support Services, in their Milestone 3 reports for 2009, reported varying progress in terms of NZC implementation. One region reported 'significant progress', and others listed 'key shifts' in the right direction, such as:

- reviewing the school's charter and vision
- more consultation with the community
- student voice more in evidence

- recognising the need to build self-review into systems and structures
- using planning templates that address the key components of NZC.

According to one SSS (2009) report, *'A significant number of schools, primary and secondary, have advanced to the point of producing a draft school curriculum'* (p.549). However, concerns were also raised. Some schools were said to have merely 'tweaked' existing policies, and understanding of principles, values and competencies remained vague in many cases. There was concern that the introduction of National Standards would deflect attention from NZC, and one report expressed the fear that *'National Standards could emerge as the de facto curriculum in those primary schools who have not engaged with NZC at any depth'* (p.183).

In the national survey of secondary schools undertaken by NZCER in 2009, principals and teachers were asked to rate the importance of changes needed relating to the implementation of NZC. For principals, the main need was to 'change aspects of pedagogy', which was rated as 'very important' by 75 percent and 'somewhat important' by a further 20 percent. The second most frequently selected item was 'rewrite schemes and/or unit plans' (52 percent very important, 36 percent somewhat important). Teachers' response to rewriting schemes was almost identical to principals, but they were much less likely to regard changing pedagogy as very important.

### Practice

We saw above that schools seemed to be making progress in terms of reviewing elements of NZC. It does not follow, however, that they were making equal progress in putting them into practice. After the November 2009 MECI surveys, three months before the date when the curriculum was to be implemented, the research team concluded that

*"...key curriculum elements are not yet strongly evident in practice ... While there are certainly pockets of significant progress in particular schools, the general pattern is to have made only surface level shifts, or to have addressed only certain aspects of the new curriculum. Many have been thinking about and considering how practices might shift to more strongly reflect the NZC, but fewer have actually applied those practices."* (Sinnema, 2010, p.6).

Based on factor analysis of questionnaire responses, MECI identified seven 'practice factors' related to NZC. Detailed analysis indicated that very limited progress had been made between 2008 and 2009 in these. There were statistically significant but very small differences related to the key competencies and to teaching as inquiry, but none for values, student agency or parental involvement. Understanding of teaching as inquiry was variable, and thinking about values tended to focus on defining, modelling and encouraging, rather than integrating values into learning experiences across the curriculum.

MECI found significant differences between primary and secondary schools: in the extent to which each practice factor was evident, primary schools were further advanced; the difference was particularly marked in terms of parental involvement. MECI also found that principals were more positive than teachers in their assessment of all of the practice factors. The primary/secondary and principal/teacher differences were larger than the differences between the 2008 and 2009 samples.

In a separate question, MECI survey respondents were asked to indicate the extent of change to various aspects of their day-to-day practice. In 2008 the proportion reporting moderate or substantial change ranged from 20 percent (for 'reporting approach') to 34 percent (for both 'planning documentation' and 'approaches/activities used in teaching and learning'). In 2009 the proportion reporting change had increased considerably (it was as high as 60 percent for 'planning documentation'). It should be noted that respondents were asked to indicate the **extent** of change, not the **nature** of change, so the changes referred to may not necessarily have been in a direction aligned with NZC intentions. They indicate willingness to change, but do not provide evidence of NZC being put into practice.



## 3. Professional development

Evidence from sources such as those mentioned above indicates varying levels of understanding of curriculum intent. There is a clear need for professional development and support, if NZC is to be implemented effectively.

A three-year implementation programme was designed to support schools in understanding the curriculum intent and enacting it in a way that best suits the diverse learning needs of their students and the expectations of their communities. In 2007 all schools were allocated a teacher-only day to explore the intent of the NZC; in 2008 two additional teacher-only days were allocated to secondary schools for this purpose, and one to primary schools (these days could be held over into 2009 if desired). Resources (online and paper-based) were made available, and a programme of targeted support was provided by the Ministry.

SSS advisers are playing a key role in providing this support to schools in learning areas and curriculum design. In addition, the Ministry arranged in 2008 for the establishment of networked learning communities (NLCs), which aim to provide initial support for school leaders in coming to understand the school-level changes needed as a result of NZC, and to offer support for schools as they go about implementing these changes. Each learning community is led by an NLC 'sector leader' and supported by an advisor from the regional SSS. In 2009 there were about 150 NLCs nationally and the number has increased to 195 in 2010.

### 3.1 Organisation of PD

The Curriculum Implementation Exploratory Studies (CIES) project involved fieldwork in schools chosen because they belonged to Principals' Professional Learning Group (PPLG) clusters (convened specifically to explore the implementation of NZC), or were reputed to be 'early adopter' schools. Two visits were undertaken to these schools, the first in March-April 2008, and the second in December 2008 or early 2009.

The research team found that, over time, school leaders had been changing the way professional learning (PL) sessions were organised. They had changed staff meetings to focus on professional discussion rather than administration; set aside regular time for PL after school; introduced late starts for students once a week, to allow more time for PL; refocused existing teams, or created new ones. All of these spaces were used for discussion about NZC, in addition to the teacher-only days provided.

The sessions focused on the broad picture and helped teachers to see the need for change. Activities built on prior learning and explored how the curriculum linked with existing school practices; encouraged staff to review existing school documents; and unpacked the newer areas of the curriculum, such as the key competencies and values. Secondary teachers appreciated the opportunity for learning conversations in cross-curricular groupings, which tended to focus more on pedagogy than subjects.

The MECI surveys showed that internal support (from colleagues, based on discussion of relevant documents) was more common than external support (from advisers, facilitators, consultants and colleagues from other schools). Some focus group participants expressed frustration about the limited availability of such expertise, and SSS confirmed that some schools were reluctant to run their own teacher-only days without external support. External support could prove very effective when it was available (see for example Hipkins et al., 2009, p.9).

A variety of approaches to professional learning had been used by SSS, including a series of discussion sessions (with or without a facilitator), workshops, conferences, sector leader days and establishing clusters in areas where there were large number of small schools which often had first-time principals. Some schools had established action learning projects<sup>5</sup>, and a primary principal from one of the CIES schools observed that, unlike PD workshops where teachers hear good ideas and may or may not follow them up, teaching as inquiry is more likely to lead to actual changes in practice.

### 3.2 Quantity and quality

In general, MECI respondents rated the *quantity* of support provided on the miserly rather than generous end of the continuum. On a 0-5 scale, the *quality* of support received a mean rating of 2.63 in 2008. Both quantity and quality were rated higher in 2009, but the changes were not large. MECI found a clear and significant relationship between schools' rating of support in terms of quality, and their reported level of regard, confidence, practice and change. ERO, in their August 2009 report, found that most schools were making good use of available resources, while the PD and advisory services provided by the Ministry of Education *'have been recognised by many schools as factors that have contributed significantly to their success'* (ERO, 2009b, p.13).

Respondents to the NZEI and PPTA 2008 surveys were asked to say which forms of support they had accessed, and to rate their quality. Ministry of Education paper and online resources had been accessed by a large majority of schools in both sectors.<sup>6</sup> A majority of secondary schools had also been involved in workshops for senior managers run by SSS, and in cluster meetings led by sector leaders.

In terms of quality, secondary school respondents appeared to be generally less positive than their primary colleagues (Table 4).

**Table 4: Satisfaction with support provided by Ministry (as at June 2008)**

Schools satisfied or very satisfied	Secondary %	Primary %
PD opportunities for teachers to do initial thinking	21	29
PD opportunities for managers to do initial thinking	23	38
Planning/implementation time for teachers	25	24
Planning/implementation time for managers	25	30
Time for accessing community input	43	48
Access to paper resources	62	72
Quality of paper resources	56	72
Access to online resources	67	79
Quality of online resources	66	75
Access to sector leaders	48	41
Quality of sector leaders	59	58
Access to School Support Services advice	59	46
Quality of School Support Services advice	59	51

Source: NZEI/PPTA surveys. PPTA percentages have been recalculated (eliminating non-response) to make them comparable with NZEI.

<sup>5</sup> One school made action research compulsory for all teachers. See Hipkins et al., 2009, p.13.

<sup>6</sup> Paper resources by 83 percent of primary schools and 88 percent of secondary schools; online resources by 73 percent of each.

In both sectors, a majority were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of online and paper resources, and a smaller majority were satisfied with the quality of SSS advice (secondary principals gave the more positive response on access to and quality of SSS advice). However, a substantial majority were **not** satisfied with the time allowed for planning and implementation (teachers and middle/senior managers) and with the PD opportunities for teachers and managers to do some initial thinking.

### 3.3 Collaborative PD

ERO reported in January 2009 that school-wide development initiatives (involving trustees, staff, students and parents) were generally more effective than PD for school managers and curriculum leaders, who then shared the information gained with the school and community. They also observed that *'Some schools were part of cluster training, and found the opportunities for collaboration helpful'* (ERO, 2009a, p.15). Seven months later, they affirmed that established relationships (through existing clusters) were being used as a helpful context for NZC preparation: *'Networking with other schools is another valuable means of gaining confidence and momentum through collegial discussions and sharing of ideas and resources'* (ERO, 2009b, p.14).

At the end of 2009, SSS referred to increased collaboration between schools, and to networking as a means of sharing ideas and good practice to further develop NZC implementation. In their judgement, collaborative learning had led to a deepened understanding of NZC intent. ERO (2010) found examples of cross-sector collaboration to ensure continuity for students moving between schools. The CIES researchers also referred to developing relationships between primary, intermediate and secondary schools in some areas, and noted that provision of a coherent learning programme is one of the eight principles of NZC. They also observed that *'Coherence and alignment are enhanced when clusters of schools within the same locality work together to discuss the intent of the curriculum and its implications for practice.'* (Cowie et al, 2010, p.14).

### 3.4 Content of PD

PD sessions related to NZC covered a range of topics. In one region, SSS offered workshops focusing on effective pedagogy, curriculum integration, learning areas, and managing change. They noted that a lot of the initial work on values, principles and the key competencies was surface-level only, and schools were recognising the need to revisit these topics in greater depth. In another region, the topics addressed included the key competencies, the principles of NZC, school self-review and developing a school-based curriculum.

It is not only teachers who need to understand the intent and implications of NZC. In one SSS region, 14 workshops were held for Board of Trustee (BoT) members. The workshops examined NZC's underpinning theories and governance implications. All participants showed high levels of interest and engagement.

### 3.5 Support needed

We noted above that teachers surveyed were often critical of the quantity of support they had received. The corollary is that more support was needed. Principals surveyed in June 2008 by the NZEI or the PPTA were asked what they would like to see happening to support the implementation of the new curriculum. There were requests for clearer information, including models for curriculum design, development and implementation. But the overwhelming priority was time: *"Time to think, time to plan, time to implement, time to review and think again"; "Time to reflect, review, evaluate without the pressure of everyday responsibilities."* (PPTA, nd, p.5.) In their view, funded teacher release time was needed, perhaps in the form of further teacher-only days.

In December 2009, SSS regions identified a number of areas of continuing need, including:

- understanding the intent of the NZC principles
- interpreting and implementing the NZC in the classroom
- deeper understanding of the key competencies
- deeper understanding of curriculum theory and practice
- how to engage and consult with the community
- how to establish and maintain self-review processes.



## 4. Community engagement

Community engagement is one of the principles of NZC. The school ‘community’ is a term variously used to mean staff, students, parents/whānau, other people connected with the school, people living in the area, or any combination of these. In many New Zealand schools, it would be appropriate to talk specifically about their Māori or Pasifika community. Similarly, ‘engagement’ can mean anything from giving information, through consultation to full collaboration. An ERO evaluation of schools’ engagement with parents, whānau and communities defined engagement as *‘a meaningful, respectful partnership between schools and their parents, whānau, and communities that focused on improving the educational experiences and successes for each child.’* (ERO, 2008, p.1).

Extrapolating from its principles, the intent of NZC is that students and families, at least, should have a say in the development of the school curriculum. In the NZCER national survey of secondary schools (2009) principals and teachers were asked to rate the importance of giving students a voice in curriculum planning, and seeking input from parents, the Māori community and the community generally. A third of secondary principals (32 percent) thought that student voice was very important, and a further 45 percent thought it was somewhat important. The percentages were almost as high for Māori community input; they were lower for parent and community input, but around 60 percent of principals thought that each was at least somewhat important.

Secondary teachers were much less convinced. Only 15 percent thought that student voice was very important, and 38 percent that it was somewhat important. The proportions were very slightly higher for Māori input, and lower for parent and community input. It should be noted that few teachers or principals thought that these forms of engagement were ‘not at all important’, but up to 18 percent thought that they were ‘not very important’, and a substantial proportion (ranging from 17 to 30 percent) were unsure. Ninety-one percent of teachers thought that parents should have opportunities to discuss their child’s progress, but only 72 percent felt that they should have opportunities to be involved in decisions about learning in general. Less than half (45 percent) regarded parent input into the curriculum as very or somewhat important.

According to a paper prepared by NZCER (nd), *‘Current NZ research about community engagement suggests that most schools are operating nearer the ‘inform’ end of the continuum.’* (p.2). During Terms 1 and 2 2007 ERO included 233 school reviews in its evaluation of schools’ engagement with parents, whānau and communities. Nearly three quarters of these schools’ ERO reports included recommendations for improving engagement. Of these, about a quarter were about developing or improving learning partnerships with parents (ERO, 2008, p.3). ERO has developed indicators for successful engagement based on what worked well for schools.

In the remainder of this chapter, we consider findings from other research and evaluation projects with reference to student voice, and engagement with parents/whānau, Māori/Pasifika, and the community at large.

### 4.1 Student voice

In the NZCER national survey of secondary schools (2009), teachers were asked about student involvement in a range of learning activities. A substantial minority of secondary teachers said that students were involved quite often or most of the time in activities that related directly to their own individual learning. However, a very small proportion reported student involvement (at least quite often) in learning in general, such as setting of topics to be taught (14 percent) or assessment tasks (five percent). Two-thirds of teachers said that students were never or almost never involved in the latter.

By contrast, involving students in curriculum decisions was a feature of many of the CIES case studies (Cowie et al, 2010, p.41). Students were being actively consulted prior to, or during, staff consideration of the curriculum and its implementation. A number of schools had formed or revitalised school councils, which appeared to be listened to seriously on topics including curriculum change. Some schools had established a student version of a leading learning group to provide a barometer of student opinion. And surveys had often been used to access student ideas about proposed changes and themes or topics that they wished to study. However, the research team noted that student influence on determining directions for classroom learning was not a frequent occurrence (p.21). There is an apparent contradiction between this finding and the one noted above, unless there is a distinction between involvement at school and classroom level.

In the 2009 MECI survey, 55 percent of respondents (principals and teachers, primary and secondary) reported that student participation in decisions about their learning was strongly or very strongly evident, and 34 percent said the same about assessment. The remainder said that it was evident at times, or not at all. Developing student agency in decision making was seen as a big step, or even a risk, by many teachers. Concern was also expressed that students and their parents would not have the expectation of this kind of student involvement, so there was a need for education as well as change.

Nevertheless, the proportion of MECI respondents reporting that students participate in decisions about how they learn and are assessed was much higher than the NZCER survey findings (quoted above) would suggest. There are several possible (not mutually exclusive) explanations for this.

First, the NZCER respondents were secondary school teachers, while the MECI respondents included principals and teachers from both primary and secondary sectors. MECI found that principals were more positive than teachers, and primary schools more positive than secondary, in their assessment of all the practice factors, including student agency (see Section 2.2). This is likely to explain part of the very large differences observed here, but may not be sufficient to account for the whole.

Second, the difference may reflect the wording of the items in the questionnaires. MECI talked about student participation in decisions about how ‘they’ learn, so the question may have been understood as referring to individual learning and assessment rather than learning and assessment in general. Further, MECI asked how frequently students ‘participate in decisions’ about what they learn or how they are assessed. NZCER asked if students were ‘involved’ with the setting of topics and assessment tasks. Participating in decisions could be interpreted as referring to consultation prior to the setting of topics and assessment tasks by the teacher; involvement could suggest a higher level of student agency.

Finally, it should be acknowledged that the terms used could be interpreted in different ways, by different people, or indeed by the same people at different times (perhaps reflecting change in their own understanding). However, as the surveys were undertaken at approximately the same time, and both involved large-scale samples (likely to include respondents at all stages of their NZC ‘journey’), there is no reason to suppose that the understanding of one group would be significantly different from the other.

## **4.2 Parents/whānau**

The ERO evaluation undertaken in the first half of 2007 included meetings and discussion groups with parents and whānau, including parents of Māori, Pasifika, refugee and migrant children, and children with special needs. A parent questionnaire was completed by 501 parents. ERO found that most parents want to be actively involved in decisions about their children’s learning and that it is ‘relationships that focus on children’s learning and achievement that are most highly valued.’ (ERO, 2008, p.2)

The MECI surveys asked about the extent of parent involvement in decisions about teaching and learning. The same pattern emerged in 2008 and 2009: it was common for parents to be informed (57 percent often or always in 2009), less common for them to be consulted (39 percent) and even less common for them to collaborate (20 percent). A third (32 percent) said that parents were never involved in collaboration, and 12 percent said that they were never consulted.

Over a third of the primary schools involved in the first ERO review of readiness to implement the curriculum saw consulting the community as an immediate priority. Consultation typically involved parents and whānau contributing (via surveys or hui) to the formulation of the school's vision and values. The CIES project also found that one of the most common purposes of community involvement was the development of a shared vision and values for the school. Examples of parents being involved in decisions about the curriculum were less common, although the principal of a CIES case-study school expressed the strong belief that parents (and the community) need to understand and support changes in pedagogy, assessment and reporting for those changes to have optimal impact.

One of the SSS regions identified parent/whānau engagement as an area of need, because *'Some schools are still not confident with engaging with their communities through consultation'* (SSS, 2009, p.4). The CIES final report notes that schools may need to try a range of strategies before finding those that work with their community. *'Nevertheless, a number of schools have seen large increases in community involvement when they have consulted early and meaningfully.'* (Cowie et al, 2010, p.38). A key word here is 'early'; according to CIES, some schools appear to be doing a lot of work internally before 'consulting' the community, which will militate against genuine involvement.

### 4.3 Māori/Pasifika

One of the SSS regional reports described the way of working of one adviser, based on using traditional Māori games and pastimes within physical education. This has been used as an opportunity to unpack the principles of NZC and look for examples of these in practice. It has led to closer relationships with iwi and greater interest and interaction with whānau groups.

As noted in the previous section, consultation with families was often in the area of vision and values. In some of the MECI focus groups, teachers expressed concern about dealing with values in a multicultural context. (An example was given of one school which wanted students to be proud of what they do, but for some Pasifika parents, pride was regarded almost as a sin, and they wanted the children to be taught humility.)

The ERO evaluation (2008) found that some of the most successful practices for engaging families were in schools with very diverse communities. Successful strategies were those that built relationships, enabled barriers to be broken down, and gave parents confidence to become involved in their child's learning.

Given that the principles of NZC include the Treaty of Waitangi, cultural diversity and inclusion, it may be considered surprising that there were few specific mentions of Māori or Pasifika students in the reports synthesised here. It does not follow, of course, that schools had not considered the issue. Their responses would depend on the questions asked, which in turn would depend on what the researchers or reviewers were aiming (or had been commissioned) to explore. It may also be that the first stages of curriculum implementation were at the general level (including discussion of values, in a multicultural context) and the specific issue of how NZC would affect different groups of students came later.

### 4.4 The wider community

According to ERO's second report, a high priority for most primary schools was consultation with different groups involved in the school: not just parents, teachers and students, but also 'the wider community'. This latter is probably the most difficult of all, because the wider community has to be defined in some way before consultation can take place.

In the MECI focus groups, those who spoke of community partnerships in teaching and learning usually referred to individual members of the community who were able to contribute their expertise to the school.

However, two CIES principals reported examples of town-wide or district-wide forums being established (one by the town council) to increase community engagement in education. The ERO evaluation of schools' engagement with parents, whānau and communities reported on schools that had developed '*purposeful links*' (p.20) with the wider community through involvement with groups, agencies, and local iwi. Some of these links with formalised.

## 5. The process of implementation

What stages or phases are involved in curriculum implementation? One of the SSS regions reported that, at the time of writing (December 2009), most schools had:

- created vision and values statements
- reflected on the key competencies, establishing shared thinking among staff, and sometimes also with students
- discussed the NZC principles
- begun to explore the learning areas, and linking the vision, values and key competencies into each.

Other research and evaluation is consistent with this, affirming that schools chose to unpack the ‘front end’ of NZC, before moving on to the learning areas. This was typical, according to both CIES and MECI.<sup>7</sup> One MECI focus group participant described, for example, how her school had held a whole-school teacher-only day to deal with the front end, followed by staff meetings focusing on the learning areas. According to an SSS (2009) report, *‘Professional learning opportunities have largely focused on understanding the front of the NZC with departments translating this into their context in their own professional learning time’* (p.101).

We summarise below reports on the work done by schools at different stages of NZC implementation, though there is often insufficient evidence to show how these are linked. Overlaps are inevitable, and we do not mean to imply that all schools have worked through these stages in the order listed. In the NZCER national survey of secondary schools (2009) principals and teachers were asked which aspects of NZC had been explored as a whole staff. Findings will be referred to below, but it is worth noting here that in most cases principals were more likely than teachers to say that an area had been covered.

**Planning.** In their first (January 2009) report ERO observed that between a quarter and a third of secondary schools had prioritised such aspects as establishing an action plan or timeline for curriculum implementation. Those that had done this early in the preparation process had made good progress.

**Building on existing work.** There are examples of schools deliberately looking for matches between NZC and the work they were already doing. It can be encouraging to realise that implementing NZC need not require wholesale change, because schools are already moving in the direction required. Schools involved in a curriculum conference mainly took the view that *‘implementation is an evolutionary process rather than a revolution’* (Hipkins et al, 2009, p.45). They were *‘capitalising on their existing strengths to take them further’*. MECI points out, however, that there is a danger that schools may convince themselves that they are doing everything already, and ignore the opportunities for change, improvement and deeper understanding of the NZC intent.

**Vision and values.** As noted above, most schools started here. According to principals in the 2009 NZCER survey, 95 percent of secondary schools had explored both the vision statement and values as a whole staff. However, only three-quarters of the secondary teachers surveyed said that they had been involved in such an exercise.

---

<sup>7</sup> See also Hipkins et al. (2009): *“Revisiting and revising existing values and vision statements was a common starting point for undertaking this exploration of the big-picture messages from the front end of NZC”*(p.4).

In their first readiness review (January 2009), ERO emphasised the importance of preparatory work on vision, values and key competencies being completed as a school-wide project, rather than (as in some cases) being done at an individual departmental level. Effective consultation usually resulted in a better shared understanding about the key elements of a school's curriculum.

In the same report, ERO looked at how advanced 43 secondary schools were (by the latter half of 2008) in the review and design of their school curriculum in relation to the key components of NZC. They found that 18 of the schools were either initiating or well advanced in curriculum design with reference to vision and values, compared with 14 for the key competencies, nine for the learning areas and six for the principles. The picture for the larger group of primary schools was very similar.

Later (in December 2009), SSS reports confirmed that 'Many schools [are] using vision as starting point in NZC implementation' (p.169). One report observed that *'A number of catholic schools are using values as a key entry point into NZC, and this is leading to some innovative curriculum work focussed around both vision and values'* (SSS, 2009, p.114). The same report noted however that much of the initial work on values, principles and key competencies was 'surface' (see Section 3.4); schools were recognising this and were setting up processes to revisit these areas and develop deeper understanding.

**Key competencies.** Development work on the key competencies was also an early priority for schools. Hipkins et al. observed back in 2007 that *'Some [of the so-called 'early adopter'] schools anticipated the direction of change and have already begun experimenting with their own version of the key competencies'* (pamphlet 2, p.1).

According to the NZCER 2009 survey, 91 percent of secondary school principals (and 81 percent of secondary school teachers) said that the competencies had been explored as a whole staff.

ERO found that, in the first half of 2009, the priority for most primary schools was working on the key competencies: *'Many were aiming to complete the process of aligning the competencies to the school vision and values, and integrating them into plans for teaching and learning.'* (ERO, 2009b, p.7). The principal and deputy principal of a full primary case-study school expressed the view that key competencies would drive curriculum implementation in their school (Hipkins et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, an SSS report (December 2009) identified teachers' understanding of the key competencies in relation to learning areas and pedagogical content knowledge as an area of need, stating that in some cases their understanding remained quite shallow. This is consistent with the view noted above, that much of the initial work on the key competencies (as well as that on values and principles) was at a surface level only. SSS reports also noted that there was ongoing confusion around assessment of the key competencies, and that some teachers had difficulty with the understanding that key competencies needed to be monitored but not assessed.

By the second half of 2009, according to ERO, 46 percent of schools were well underway, and 50 percent underway, in terms of integrating the key competencies into teaching and learning programmes. ERO reported that in many secondary schools, teachers had benefited from regular NZC-related PD which was often focused on the key competencies: *'understanding them, integrating them into teaching and learning programmes and monitoring them'* (ERO, 2010, p.13).

**Principles.** According to the NZCER survey, 88 percent of secondary school principals, and 73 percent of teachers, said that they had explored the NZC principles as a whole staff. Just over a third of principals and teachers said that they had explored the principles in teams, and a smaller proportion (13 percent of principals, 15 percent of teachers) said they explored them individually. Very few (two percent of principals, six percent of teachers) said they were not yet a focus.

Comments about the principles have been included in some of what has already been said, since they relate also to the vision and values, and/or the key competencies. However, an SSS report (2009, p.5) observed that the principles were *'not generally being recognised as the foundation of curriculum decision making'* because they were *'significantly overshadowed'* by the key competencies. Schools therefore needed help with understanding the intent of the principles, and how they should underpin all curriculum decision making.

**Pedagogy.** Responding to the NZCER survey, 85 percent of secondary principals, but only 65 percent of teachers, said that effective pedagogy had been explored as a whole staff. CIES talked to school leaders about the means used to encourage pedagogical change; they found that effective leaders adopted very different strategies, *'according to the perceived needs of their staff and the specificities of their school context'* (Cowie et al, 2009, p.29). Some schools were considering, or experimenting with, changes to the timetable and/or physical spaces to better accommodate new pedagogical approaches.

CIES case-study school leaders said that, as they began to explore what constitutes effective pedagogy, they needed to go back and review their vision and goals, because their understanding of the scope of these had evolved. (This is consistent with what was said above about the need to revisit values, principles and key competencies for more in-depth exploration.) Principals highlighted *'the centrality of the relationship between the school vision for student learning and achievement and teacher pedagogical practices in support of this'* (Cowie et al, 2009, p.18).

**Teacher inquiry cycle.** CIES found that, over the two years of fieldwork, the use of 'teacher as inquirer' models was starting to become more common in schools. In contrast with the cycle presented in NZC, models often included feedback from the school leadership team, professional development advisers or teacher colleagues (based on mutual observation). However, there was in many cases a lack of understanding about the meaning of the teaching as inquiry process; some staff were confusing this with the inquiry learning approaches they were using with their students. In some schools, where the term 'teacher as inquirer' came to be more commonly used, the misunderstanding was addressed, but in other schools the confusion was still evident. MECI also found a great deal of variation in focus group participants' understanding of teaching as inquiry, and in particular *'a significant degree of confusion'* between teaching as inquiry and inquiry learning approaches (Sinnema, 2010, p.17).

An SSS report also talked about the confusion between 'teaching as inquiry' and 'inquiry learning'. Another gave a more positive assessment, but noted that individual support from an adviser had been necessary for some teachers to fully engage with the process. Moreover, *'A few teachers are still resistant and need collegial support'* (SSS, 2009, p.101). A third report listed teaching as inquiry among the greatest strengths in current (2009) school practice, although the full wording *'teachers focusing on teaching as inquiry and learning alongside students in their inquiry processes'* (p.4) could perhaps tend to foster the confusion already described.

As a result of the confusion surrounding the term, ERO no longer refers to teaching as inquiry in their third (2010) report. Instead, they talk about *'using an evidence-based approach to teaching'*. By the second half of 2009, ERO found that all or most teachers in 61 percent of the schools reviewed were using an evidence-based approach, and in only seven percent of the schools was it not being used by any teachers. There was still a difference between sectors, with an evidence-based approach being used by most or all teachers in nearly two-thirds of primary schools but less than half of secondary schools.

**Curriculum design and review.** In the NZCER secondary school survey (2009), just under half of the principals (48 percent) and just over a third of the teachers (37 percent) said they had been involved in curriculum design and review.

According to ERO's first report:

*“School curriculum design and review involves making decisions about how to give effect to the national curriculum in ways that best address the particular needs, interests, and circumstances of the school’s students and community.”* (ERO, 2009a, p.4).

The second ERO report (August 2009) stressed the importance of curriculum design and review being seen as a cyclic process. Therefore *‘A critical driver in successful curriculum design, implementation and delivery is the effectiveness of the school’s self review or inquiry process.’* (ERO, 2009b, p.1). *‘Curriculum design and implementation is informed by ongoing inquiry into what is working and how well it is working for diverse students.’* (p.2).

The second round of CIES data collection (end of 2008 or beginning of 2009) revealed a growing understanding from school leaders that *‘curriculum implementation involves an iterative adaptive cycle of trialling, reflection and the generation of new possibilities’* (Cowie et al, 2009, p.19).

Experimentation was encouraged, because school leaders acknowledged the importance of taking risks and trialling ideas in the classroom (experimenting and risk-taking were described as strengths in one SSS area at the end of 2009). They had come to realise that curriculum implementation *‘takes time and requires ongoing change’* (Cowie et al, 2009, p.32).

CIES found that the ‘iterative process’ of engaging with NZC ideas was common in primary schools but less firmly embedded in the intermediate and secondary sectors.



## 6. Factors influencing implementation

Both ERO and MECI attempt to identify the factors which may help or hinder effective curriculum implementation. Although their lists are not identical, there is substantial overlap, and a large measure of consistency with the CIES themes. The main points are summarised below.

### 6.1 Factors supporting implementation

**A good starting-point.** It was helpful if schools were already heading in the right direction, particularly if NZC ideas could be linked to some form of existing practice or recent professional learning. According to CIES, “*many schools had already been engaged in ongoing review prior to the arrival of NZC and had processes in place for staff to work collaboratively to explore new ideas or practices*” (Cowie et al, 2009, p.23). Recognising congruencies could help foster readiness for implementation, and could be particularly encouraging for new or inexperienced leaders.

**Effective leadership.** ERO, CIES and MECI (focus groups)<sup>8</sup> all agreed that committed professional leadership, with capacity for change management, was crucial to effective implementation of NZC. In their first (January 2009) report, ERO observed:

*“The principal, although not always intimately involved in the detail, played a key role in managing the transition process through well-understood and communicated lines of delegation, and by ensuring that those who needed to be informed and involved knew what was expected of them.”* (ERO, 2009a, p.17).

The importance of school leadership, ‘*and in particular leaders’ capability to lead others’ curriculum learning*’ was mentioned by many of the MECI focus group participants (Sinnema, 2010, p.35). SSS advisers also found ‘*a growing recognition of the importance of the school leader in growing and sustaining professional learning*’ (SSS, 2009, p.3). Teachers from schools that were ‘early adopters’ of ideas and practices related to the key competencies often commented that their principal or deputy principal was an essential driver and supporter of teachers’ professional growth. Interestingly, CIES identified that, while principal leadership was a necessary prerequisite for curriculum reform, **distributed** leadership was essential for sustained change.

One SSS region reported that there was a distributed leadership style in the schools which were most effectively engaging with NZC. On the other hand, there were examples of schools led by principals who took control and offered limited scope for staff involvement, and a school where the principal gave no real leadership or even support to staff willing to address the issue of NZC implementation. Additional support from advisers was needed to enable these schools to make progress.

In some CIES schools, new principals had been appointed with the explicit expectation that they would get curriculum change under way. Several of the schools reviewed by ERO in 2008 also had new principals. ERO noted that this could slow the process of implementing NZC (because the principals had other priorities to deal with) or could provide an opportunity for a fresh start, creating new momentum.

---

<sup>8</sup> The impact of leadership was not explored in the MECI surveys.

**A shared understanding.** In their first (January 2009) report, ERO stressed the importance of developing a shared school-wide understanding of NZC in the context of the individual school. They found that effective school-wide involvement usually led to a better shared understanding of the school's curriculum at classroom level.

In their most recent (2010) report, ERO identified 'collaborative staff' as a key factor typically associated with good progress towards implementation. By this they meant not only a shared understanding of NZC, but also knowledge of how they could and would be involved in preparing for implementation, and '*a say in the design of learning programmes that reflected their local context*' (ERO, 2010, p.15).

**An action plan.** According to ERO's first report, one of the key factors was a planned approach to implementation; schools that had defined the activities and tasks to be undertaken, had designated who would be involved and specified a timeline for completion of each phase, were making good progress towards implementation. The third ERO report noted that some of the schools already giving effect to NZC had been helped by starting their preparations early, and using the long lead-in period effectively.

**External support.** ERO stated in January 2009 that schools that were well advanced had made good use of external PD and also of the electronic and print resources provided by the Ministry. MECI also mentioned the availability of high-quality support as a key factor.

**Wider consultation.** In August 2009, ERO reported that '*School leaders who actively sought opinions and ideas from teachers, parents, students and other community groups at an early stage gave the participants a sense of ownership that provided a firm foundation for subsequent planning*' (ERO, 2009b, p.10). In June 2010 they noted that those schools that were already giving full effect to NZC had used a variety of methods to consult with parents and find out what they wanted the school to do for their children. Feedback had provided a solid foundation for developing a vision, a set of values, key competencies and assessment objectives. Moreover, '*Schools that succeeded in engaging the interest and support of their communities, including Māori communities, were in a strong position to strategically advance their progress.*' (ERO, 2010, p.7).

CIES observed that a supportive (and well-informed) Board of Trustees could be '*an added catalyst for assisting change*' (Cowie et al, 2009, p.17). Both CIES and ERO (August 2009 report) felt that school networks or clusters could be useful in supporting change, as they enable teachers to observe what is happening in different contexts, and so provide ideas about what can be done.

**Student focus.** In their most recent (2010) report, ERO identified 'the centrality of the learner' as one of the key features of schools that had made good progress in the implementation of NZC. This involved informing students about NZC and what it meant for them; consulting them about teaching and learning; demonstrating that their perspective was valued and that their views had been considered in decision making. It also meant teachers putting learner-focused strategies into practice.

**Trialling ways of working and reviewing progress.** The importance of experimentation and risk-taking was mentioned in Chapter 5. ERO noted (in August 2009) that successful schools had established formats and systems for planning, delivering and assessing their curriculum; they were regularly collecting evidence to inform decisions about changes to practice. This meant that teachers were confident about trying out new ideas and finding out what worked best.

## 6.2 Factors hindering implementation

Curriculum implementation could be hindered by a lack of the positive factors identified above. In addition, the following factors could have a negative impact on curriculum change.

**Staffing issues.** There were three problems in this area. First, a high staff turnover would threaten the inevitably lengthy process of developing a shared understanding of NZC and planning its implementation. Second, new or inexperienced teachers could find it difficult to cope with the flexible nature of NZC, perhaps feeling a need for more detailed direction as to what they should teach. Third, staff who had been teaching perhaps for many years in a more traditional way might be apathetic or resistant to the idea of wholesale change. Those who had not been consulted about the school's vision and values, or made aware of the intent and principles of NZC, might also be reluctant to 'buy in' to the process of change<sup>9</sup>.

Individual schools may experience any or all of these problems, and it will require a skilled principal to deal with them. Those interviewed by CIES researchers spoke of the need to manage resistance to change, and to ensure that the pace of change was compatible with staff needs, beginning with small steps if necessary. A change of principal during this period could therefore cause even greater difficulties, although (as noted above) new principals were sometimes appointed with the specific task of implementing change.

**Time.** Assuming that staffing issues are resolved, do teachers have enough time to cope with all that is involved in curriculum implementation? The MECI surveys asked respondents to identify the extent to which each of ten items was likely to be a barrier. They could rate them from 'not a barrier' to 'an extremely serious barrier'. The average rating for most items was around the 'minor barrier' level, and it is encouraging that, in every case, factors were perceived as less of a barrier in 2009 than in 2008.

However, there was one factor that responses indicated was a much more serious problem. 'Time for planning and implementation' was rated a moderate to difficult barrier in 2008, though in 2009 it was closer to the moderate level. This is consistent with the NZEI/PPTA 2008 survey, which indicated that teachers' greatest need was for more time (see Section 3.5). An SSS report also noted that '*Time for implementation continues to be an issue raised by schools as impeding their progress towards fully giving effect to NZC*' (SSS, 2009, p.144).

**School structures.** Several of the MECI focus groups discussed the organisational structures and systems that could hinder implementation of NZC. The timetable in secondary schools was seen as a particular constraint. As a consequence, some schools were considering, or experimenting with, changes (see Chapter 5).

**Conflicting demands.** Throughout the MECI evaluation, the competing demands of assessment and qualifications were mentioned by secondary school respondents as barriers to implementation of NZC. In the latter stages, primary participants expressed concern about the perceived competing demands of National Standards. SSS reported concern expressed by advisers as well as schools that '*NZC implementation will be sidelined with the introduction of the National Standards*' (SSS, 2009, p.169). One region believed that '*Without further intensive professional development that builds deep understandings of curriculum theory and practice, schools will default to current practice dressed up as NZC, or adopt National Standards as their school curriculum*' (p.181).

In their most recent (2010) report, ERO noted that there were a small number of schools where teachers and leaders claimed that the introduction of National Standards may distract them from work on NZC. However, they observed that

---

<sup>9</sup> It is encouraging to note that in their most recent report, ERO found less evidence of apathy and resistance to change (see Section 2.2).

most schools had *'faced these challenges, responded appropriately to them, and continued to make progress with implementing effective teaching and learning strategies'*. (ERO, 2010, p.16).

## 7. Summary and conclusions

Findings from a number of different sources consulted were not always consistent, but this is not entirely surprising given the differences in timing, samples, and methodology employed. Based on the ERO findings, it seems that a good deal of progress has been made by schools over the past two years. By the end of 2009, some schools were already giving full effect to NZC, and almost all were well on the way to doing so. There was a growing realisation that February 2010 was not an ‘end date’, and an appreciation of the cyclical nature of curriculum review. Only a few schools were yet to begin their preparation, although the fact that there were any schools in this category at that stage is a matter for concern.

Most commonly, schools began their preparation by focusing on vision and values, moved on to the key competencies, then the principles and finally attempted to integrate all of these into the learning areas. There were relatively few direct references to school curriculum design, which perhaps reflects a degree of uncertainty about the precise meaning of the term. It would seem that the activities frequently mentioned (such as integrating the key competencies into the curriculum) are part of curriculum design, rather than preparatory stages in the process. This is why it is difficult to say whether schools have or have not designed their curriculum.

Consultation with students, parents and the community was common at the early stages (particularly when considering vision and values) but happened less when preparation moved on to detailed curriculum planning. There were suggestions that some initial discussions were at surface level only, that understanding of the key competencies and principles remained vague, and that there was particular confusion about the meaning of ‘teaching as inquiry’. However, some schools were recognising the need to revisit early topics and explore them in greater depth, in the light of what they had learned subsequently.

There were indications from several sources that primary schools were further ahead than secondary schools in terms of implementing practices related to NZC. This could be because such practices fit more easily within a traditional primary school context, in comparison with the more complex nature of the secondary school curriculum.

In both the MECI and NZCER surveys, principals were consistently more positive than teachers in their assessment of the extent that NZC-related practices were in place. Why this should be so is not clear, but it could reflect, at least in part, the principal’s whole-school perspective contrasting with the teacher’s awareness of what happens in an individual classroom.

There were a number of specific areas, however, where the difference could be a matter of concern. For example, teachers were much less likely than principals to see changing pedagogy as very important (NZCER survey). Principals were more positive concerning the extent of parent involvement and student agency in practice (MECI). They were also more likely to regard community input into the curriculum (students, parents, Māori and the wider community) as important.

Schools had found a range of ways to make time for professional learning and discussion related to NZC implementation. Whole-school PD sessions were considered more helpful than sessions for school managers and curriculum leaders, who then cascaded the information to other teachers. Collaboration and networking between schools also proved useful.

In general, schools were satisfied with the quality of print and online resources provided by the Ministry, and with the support received from SSS. However, SSS reports suggested that further PD was needed to foster a deeper understanding of curriculum theory and practice. For principals surveyed by the teacher unions, the most important need was more release time for thinking, planning and action; MECI findings similarly indicated that lack of time was the most serious barrier to NZC implementation, as perceived by teachers.

Of the factors identified as supporting implementation, the most important by far was effective leadership. Principals need to be able to grow and sustain professional learning; they also need to have the capacity for change management. They can delegate aspects of the process (to other senior leaders with the requisite skills), but need to be seen as giving full and enthusiastic support to the implementation of curriculum change. The establishment of a new principal during this crucial phase could cause delays, but some new principals had been appointed with the explicit task of leading NZC implementation.

Apart from lack of time, or leadership, factors hindering the process of curriculum change were mainly related to staffing, or to the conflicting demands of other educational initiatives. There were concerns about the ability of new or inexperienced teachers to cope with the requirements of NZC, and reluctance to change on the part of teachers comfortable with familiar approaches. There were also fears that the introduction of National Standards might distract primary schools from curriculum-related work. However, the most recent ERO report was encouraging on both these topics, noting that apathy and resistance were less apparent in the latter half of 2009, and that most schools had coped with the introduction of National Standards and continued to make progress with implementing the NZC.

## References

- Cowie, B., Hipkins, R., Boyd, S., Bull, A., Keown, P. and McGee, C. with Cooper, B., Ferrier-Kerr, J., Hume, A., McKim, A., Moreland, J., Morrison, M., Bolstad, R., Spiller, L., Taylor, M. and Yates, E. (2009). *Curriculum Implementation Exploratory Studies: Final Report*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. Based on fieldwork undertaken March 2008 – early 2009.
- Education Review Office (2008). *Partners in Learning: Schools' Engagement with Parents, Whānau and Communities*. Based on reviews undertaken in Terms 1 and 2 of 2007.
- Education Review Office (2009a). *Readiness to implement The New Zealand Curriculum*. Dated Jan 2009, based on reviews undertaken in Terms 3 and 4 of 2008.
- Education Review Office (2009b). *Readiness to implement The New Zealand Curriculum*. Dated Aug 2009, based on reviews undertaken in Terms 1 and 2 of 2009.
- Education Review Office (2010). *Preparing to Give Effect to The New Zealand Curriculum*. Based on reviews undertaken in Terms 3 and 4 of 2009.
- Hipkins, R., Cowie, B. and Boyd, S. (2009). The Collaborative Path to Implementation: insights from the NZCER curriculum conference series. Wellington: NZCER.
- Hipkins, R., Roberts, J. and Bolstad, R. (2007). *Key Competencies: the journey begins*. Wellington: NZCER.
- Ministry of Education (2007). *The New Zealand Curriculum*. Wellington: Learning Media.
- New Zealand Educational Institute (2008). *NZEI Online Survey of Primary Principals on the Implementation of The New Zealand Curriculum*. Dated July 2008, based on survey undertaken June 2008.
- New Zealand Council for Educational Research (nd). *Community engagement and the New Zealand Curriculum*. Paper prepared for the Ministry of Education.
- Post Primary Teachers' Association (nd). *Survey of principals on NZ Curriculum Implementation*. Based on survey undertaken June 2008.
- Schagen, S. and Hipkins, R. (2008). *Curriculum changes, priorities and issues*. Wellington: NZCER. Findings from the NZCER secondary 2006 and primary 2007 surveys.
- School Support Services (2009). Relevant sections of December 2009 Milestone 3 reports, and Ministry responses completed February 2010.
- Sinnema, C. (2010). Monitoring and Evaluating Curriculum Implementation (MECI): Milestone 4, Final Report. [final draft version]. Based on surveys and focus groups undertaken in 2008 and 2009.

