

Learning Languages

Summary of results from the 2016 National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement for teachers and principals

Wānangatia te putanga taurira
National Monitoring Study
of Student Achievement

Purpose

The National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) is designed to assess and understand student achievement across the *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) at Year 4 and Year 8 in English-medium state schools.

What we assessed

In 2016, we looked at students' opportunities and experiences in the Learning Languages learning area of the NZC. Learning Languages encompasses international languages and two official languages of New Zealand: te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language. Unlike other learning areas where curriculum levels generally relate to years at school, in Learning Languages, the levels describe learning progressions that can have as their starting point either a 5-year-old student or a 13-year-old student. The study's focus on international languages was confined to Year 8.

In the NMSSA study, students, teachers and principals responded to questionnaires that included questions about students' experiences of learning a language, how teachers organise their language learning programmes, and schools' provision for learning languages.

The study incorporated a minor achievement focus on te reo Māori. To explore an aspect of students' proficiency in te reo Māori, a short assessment was developed. The te reo Māori (TRM) assessment gauged students' knowledge and understanding of te reo Māori words and phrases, with an emphasis on curriculum level 1 (Taumata 1) of the curriculum guidelines. All students completed the computer-administered TRM assessment.

Achievement on the TRM assessment was reported on a measurement scale that covered both year levels. The TRM scale was divided into four performance bands (Taumata 1-Wāhanga 1 [level 1, band 1] to Taumata 1-Wāhanga 4 [level 1, band 4]). Each successive band represents an increasing level of achievement within curriculum level 1.

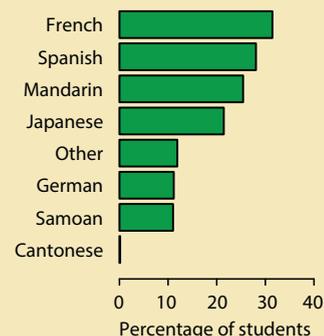
Key findings

- Sixty-one percent of Year 8 students were learning an international language at school.
- French and Spanish were the most frequently studied international languages, closely followed by Mandarin and Japanese.
- The majority of principals indicated that learning New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) at school was important, but indicated that students had limited opportunities to learn NZSL at school.
- The majority of teachers, principals and students thought learning te reo Māori was important.
- On average, Year 8 students scored 21 units higher on the TRM scale than Year 4 students, indicating that between Year 4 and Year 8 students made, on average, 5 scale score units of 'progress' per year.
- At both Year 4 and Year 8 Māori students scored higher on the TRM assessment than non-Māori students, and students from low decile schools¹ scored higher than those from high decile schools.
- Around 45 percent of principals at each year level said they had employed specialist language teachers to teach te reo Māori in 2016.

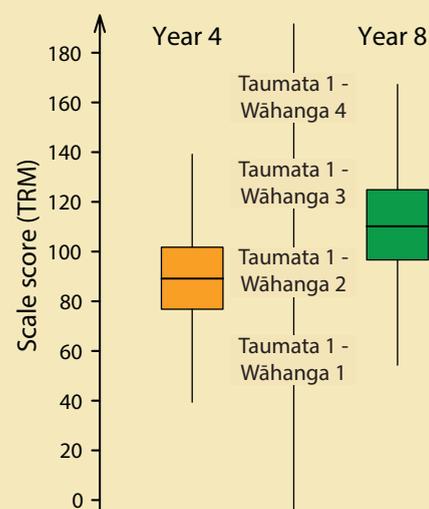
¹ The 'low' decile band comprised students in decile 1 to decile 3 schools, the 'mid' decile band, students in decile 4 to decile 7 schools and the 'high' decile band, students in decile 8 to decile 10 schools.

Study participants: About 2,300 students from 100 schools at Year 4 and at Year 8 were involved. More than 230 teachers at each year level completed the teacher questionnaire. In total, 182 principals completed the principal questionnaire; 91 from each year level.

Percentage of Year 8 students studying each international language



Distribution of scores for Year 4 and Year 8 students on the TRM scale



Refers to curriculum level 1 only.
Taumata = level / Wāhanga = band

Note: The blurred lines show the boundaries between bands. The lines are blurred to indicate the margin of error associated with defining boundaries.

Most students reported positive attitudes to learning te reo Māori.

- On average, Year 4 students had slightly more positive attitudes to learning te reo Māori than Year 8 students.
- Girls at both year levels were, on average, more positive than boys.
- Māori students tended to be more positive than non-Māori students.
- Students in low decile schools tended to have more positive attitudes than those in mid or high decile schools.

At each year level, around half of students expressed some confidence about their ability to communicate in te reo Māori.

- At both year levels, fewer than 10 percent of students were very confident about communicating in te reo Māori.
- On average, girls indicated higher confidence levels than boys.
- Māori students reported higher confidence levels than non-Māori, on average, at both year levels.
- Students in low decile schools tended to have greater confidence in their te reo Māori skills than those in high decile schools.

Teachers had mixed opportunities for professional learning and development (PLD) focused on te reo Māori.

- The majority of teachers reported having PLD focused on te reo Māori in the last two years.
- Ten percent of teachers had never had this kind of PLD.
- Over half of the teachers had never or almost never observed a colleague teaching te reo Māori.
- At both year levels, about one third of teachers' responses indicated they could not hold a simple conversation in te reo Māori.

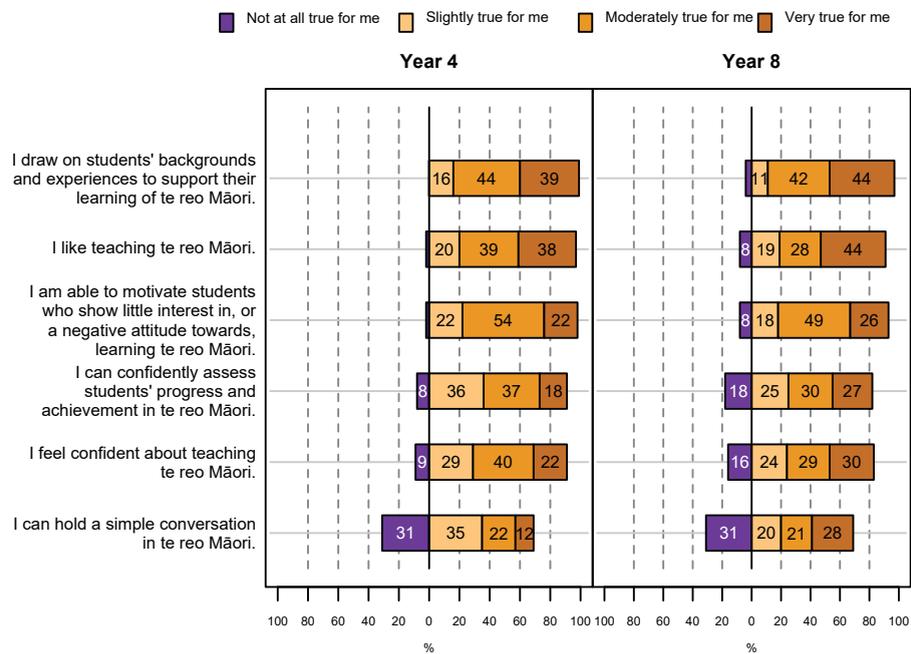
The majority of teachers, principals and students thought learning te reo Māori was important.

- Reasons given by students who thought it was important to learn te reo Māori included that it is part of New Zealand's culture and identity and more particularly, part of Māori culture.
- Reasons given by teachers and principals who thought it was important to learn te reo Māori included the status of te reo Māori as an official language of New Zealand, and that it is an accepted and valued aspect of our bicultural country.

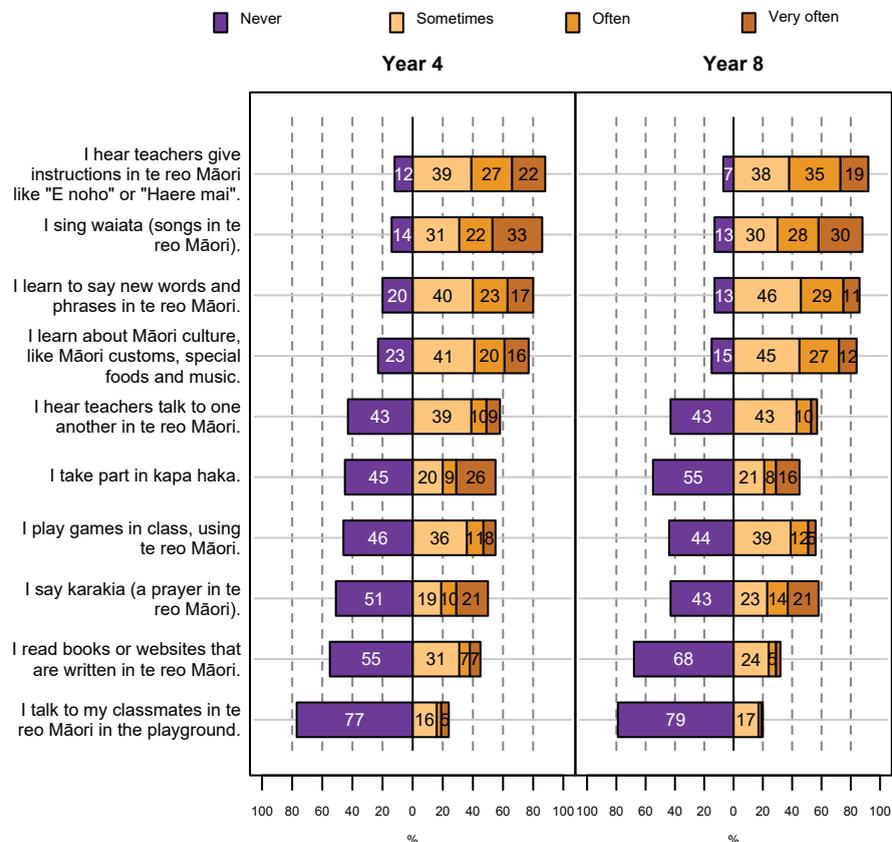
Students experienced a range of opportunities for learning te reo Māori

- Sixty-five percent of Year 4 teachers and 53 percent of Year 8 teachers estimated their students spent more than 20 hours over the year, learning te reo Māori.
- Whole class activities was the most widely used organisational strategy for teaching te reo Māori at both year levels.

Teachers' attitudes to, and expertise in, teaching te reo Māori, by year level



Students' te reo Māori learning experiences at school, by year level



The te reo Māori (TRM) assessment

The main emphasis in the TRM assessment was on language knowledge associated with curriculum level 1 (Taumata 1) of the curriculum guidelines². The tasks were presented by computer, with students able to listen to an audio recording of each question.

Sample items from the TRM assessment

4

What is an English word for *taonga*?

A town

B fade

C treasure

D tongue

BACK NEXT

11

What would be a good answer to the question, "*He aha tēnei?*"

A He tēpu

B Kei te ngenge

C Kei te pai

D Kia ora

BACK NEXT

Key findings from the TRM assessment

Greater proportions of Year 8 students achieved in the higher bands compared with Year 4 students.

- The majority (87 percent) of Year 4 students achieved at wāhanga 1 and wāhanga 2. About half of Year 8 students achieved at wāhanga 2 and wāhanga 3.
- On average, Year 8 students scored 21 units higher on the TRM scale than Year 4 students (a difference of about 5 scale score units per year).

Girls scored higher than boys.

- On average, girls scored higher than boys (by 6 scale score units at Year 4 and 8 scale score units at Year 8).

Māori students scored higher than non-Māori students.

- Māori students scored higher, on average, than non-Māori (by 13 scale score units at Year 4 and 20 scale score units at Year 8).

Students from low and mid decile schools scored higher than those from high decile schools.

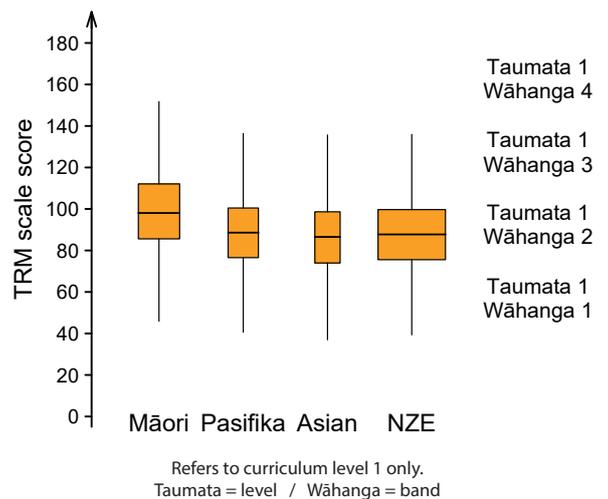
- At both year levels, the average TRM score for students in low and mid decile schools was higher than the average scores for students in high decile schools (at Year 4, the difference between average scores for students in the low and high decile bands was 4 scale score units, and at Year 8 it was 10 scale score units).

Higher achievement on the TRM assessment was associated with:

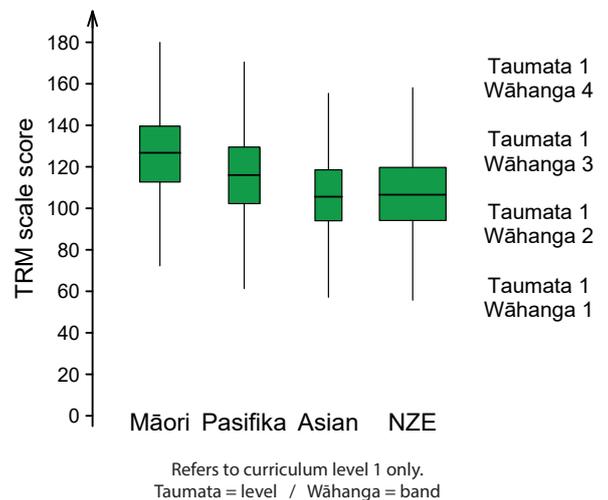
- greater confidence in te reo Māori
- a more positive attitude to learning te reo Māori
- speaking te reo Māori at home more often.

² Te Aho Arataki Marau mō te Ako i Te Reo Māori – Kura Auraki: Curriculum Guidelines for Teaching and Learning Te Reo Māori in English-medium Schools, Years 1-13 (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Distribution of scores for Year 4 students on the TRM scale, by ethnicity



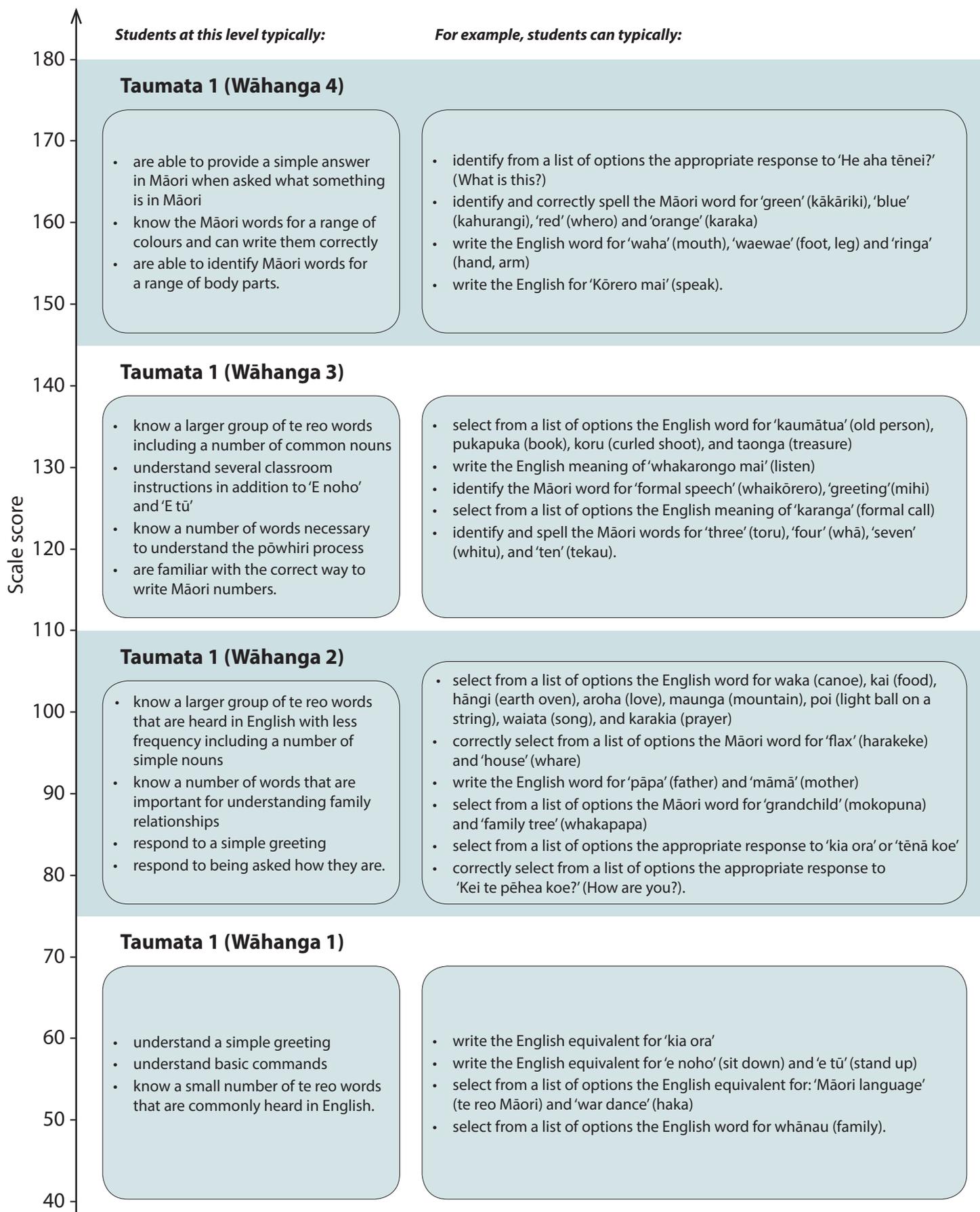
Distribution of scores for Year 8 students on the TRM scale, by ethnicity



Describing students' knowledge of te reo Māori

The graphic below shows how the knowledge and understanding of te reo Māori words and phrases typically demonstrated by students on the TRM assessment became increasingly complex as scores progressed from low to high, within curriculum level 1 (Taumata 1).

NMSSA Te Reo Māori Scale



Note: Taumata = level / Wāhanga = band

Sixty-one percent of Year 8 students were learning an international language at school.

- A greater proportion of girls than boys (64 percent compared with 58 percent) indicated they were learning an international language.
- Non-Māori students were more likely to be learning an international language than Māori students (64 percent of non-Māori students, compared with 53 percent of Māori students).
- Principals of high decile schools were more likely than those of low or mid decile schools to indicate all their Year 8 students have opportunities to learn an international language¹ (see graph at bottom right).

French and Spanish were the most frequently studied international languages, closely followed by Mandarin and Japanese.

- Pasifika students were the most likely to be learning Pasifika languages (59 percent of Pasifika students, compared with 6 percent of non-Pasifika students).
- Of the teachers who reported teaching an international language, 40 percent estimated their Year 8 students spent 20 hours or more over the year, learning that language at school.

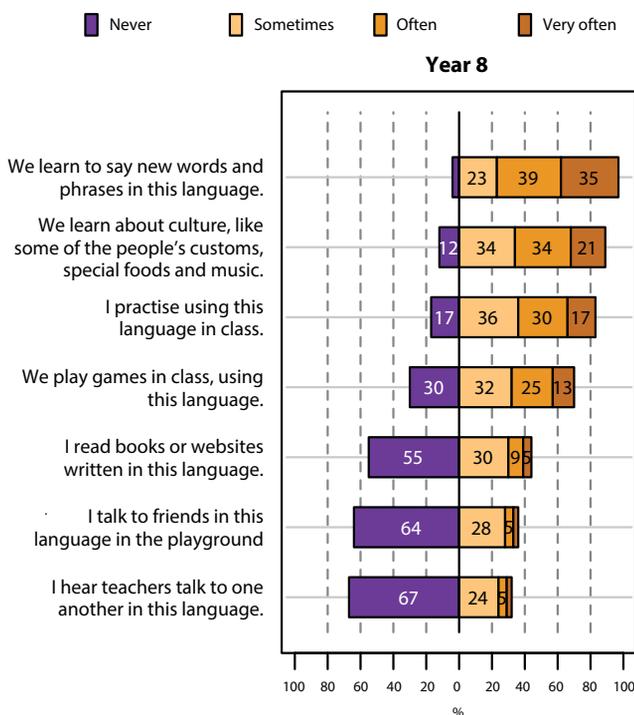
The majority of teachers, principals and students thought learning an international language was important.

- Teachers and principals reported that learning an international language helped students develop an understanding of their own cultures and identities and built self-confidence.
- Students reported that learning an international language was useful for travel.

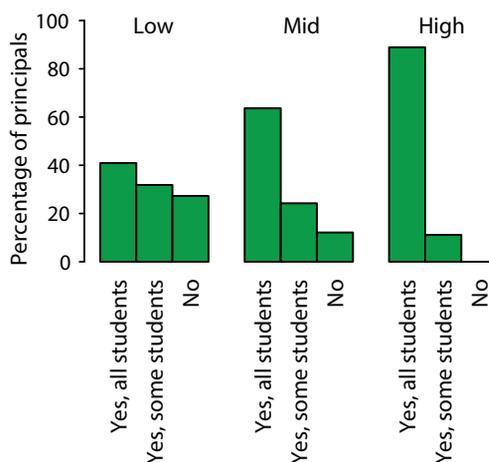
Most Year 8 students were positive about their experience of learning an international language at school.

- Most students agreed that learning their preferred international language (some were learning more than one) was interesting, they liked learning it, and wanted to learn more of it at school.
- Students' international language learning experiences were most likely to include learning to say new words and phrases, learning about culture, and practising using the language in class.

Year 8 students' perceptions of their international language learning experiences



Principals' reports of opportunities to learn an international language, by school decile band



A small proportion of teachers regularly incorporated NZSL into classroom lessons and activities.

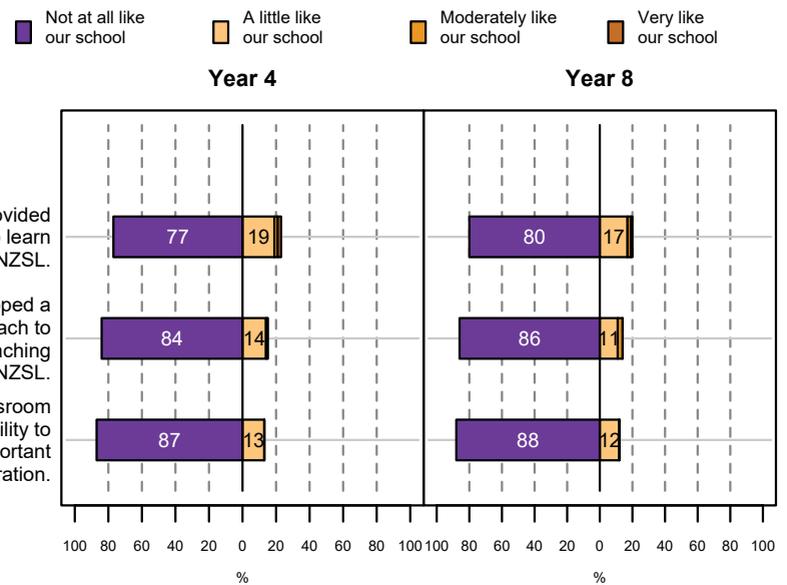
- Very few teachers at Year 4 or Year 8 reported having a student in their class with whom they needed to use NZSL.
- Nonetheless, 20 percent of Year 4 teachers and 8 percent of Year 8 teachers incorporated planned instruction in NZSL in their programme. The majority of these teachers rated the professional support they received in school for teaching NZSL as 'poor' or 'very poor'.

All students are provided with opportunities to learn NZSL.

We have developed a school-wide approach to strengthening the teaching and learning of NZSL.

When appointing a classroom teacher, their ability to teach NZSL is an important consideration.

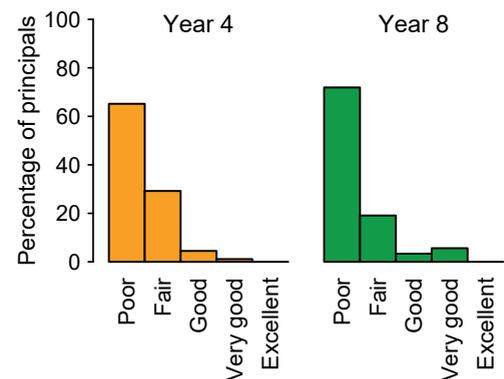
Principals' reports of school approaches to teaching and learning NZSL, by year level



The majority of principals indicated that learning NZSL at school was important, but that students had limited opportunities to do so.

- Just over two-thirds of principals at each year level rated learning NZSL at school as 'somewhat important'.
- However, the majority of principals rated their school's provision of opportunities for students to learn NZSL as 'poor'. More than three-quarters of the principals at each year level indicated their school did not: provide opportunities for all students to learn NZSL; have a school-wide approach to improving the teaching and learning of NZSL; or consider being able to teach NZSL as important when appointing a classroom teacher.

Principals' rating of their school's provision of opportunities for students to learn NZSL, by year level



For teachers, principals and curriculum leaders to consider

Te reo Māori

- How important do you think it is for (teachers and) students to learn te reo Māori? What reasons do you have for your view?
- How closely does your school-wide plan for learning te reo Māori reflect the learning progression guidelines in *Te Aho Arataki Marau mō te Ako i Te Reo Māori – Kura Auraki: Curriculum Guidelines for Teaching and Learning te reo Māori in English-medium schools, Years 1-13* (Ministry of Education, 2009)?

New Zealand Sign Language

- NZSL is one of the three official languages of New Zealand. To what extent can (teachers and) students at your school communicate using NZSL, e.g. use greetings, or thank someone (see <https://nzsl.tki.org.nz/>)?

International languages

- Have you recently discussed with your community which international languages are offered at your school and why? Which languages might the school's parents and whānau want their children to have opportunities to learn? Might there be implications for future staffing?
- Which resources (including people) in the school community could support teaching a language for students at your school?