



Keeping children engaged and achieving in **writing**

TEACHING APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES THAT WORK
He rautaki whakaako e whai hua ana

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Education Review Office
Te Tari Arotake Mātauranga

Teaching approaches and strategies that work

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Keeping children engaged
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Teaching **approaches and strategies** that work

KEEPING CHILDREN ENGAGED
AND ACHIEVING IN **WRITING**

Keeping children engaged and achieving in writing

This Education Review Office (ERO) report is one of a series of reports on teaching strategies that work. It features strategies and approaches that we observed in 40 primary schools selected from across New Zealand. These schools came from a database of 129 schools, all with rolls of 200 or more, in which the proportion of students in the upper primary years (Years 5 to 8) achieving at or above the expected standard had increased. In each case achievement levels were also above average for the decile.

We asked leaders in each school what they saw as the reasons for their school's positive achievement trajectory and then investigated the teaching strategies that had been implemented, and the outcomes.

This report shares some of the strategies and approaches used by schools who had focused on improving achievement in writing. It also shares some simple strategies used in classrooms where achievement in writing had been accelerated.

Why ERO focused on writing programmes

National data shows that while many New Zealand children make good progress during their first three to four years at primary school, the rate of progress slows during Years 5 to 8.

The 2012 *National Monitoring Study of Student Achievement (NMSSA) study, English: Writing*¹ reported many more Year 4 than Year 8 students are achieving at the expected curriculum level. That NMSSA report found 65 percent of Year 4 students achieved at or above the expected curriculum level (Level 2). However in Year 8, 65 percent of students were achieving below curriculum expectations (Level 4).

Results showed that, on average, achievement varied by gender, ethnicity and school decile. For both year levels and both measures of writing, average achievement was higher for girls than boys, lower for Māori and Pasifika students than for non-Māori and non-Pasifika students respectively, and was lower for students from lower decile schools. Findings reported by the National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) in 1998, 2002 and 2006 indicate ongoing disparities between subgroups over this period. NMSSA indicates that the differences continue and are statistically significant.

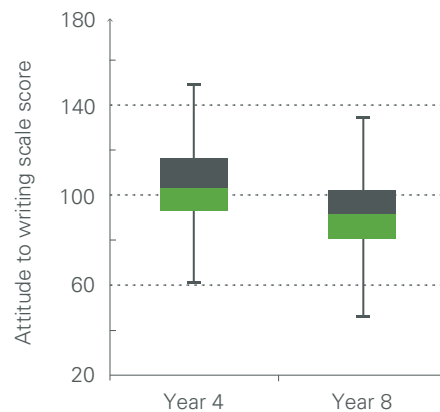
The table here shows the percentage of students achieving within the different levels of *The New Zealand Curriculum* in writing. The shaded cells indicate the expected curriculum level. These results were very similar regardless of gender, ethnicity, decile or type of school attended.

Curriculum level	Year 4 percentage	Year 8 percentage
Level 5		8
Level 4	2	27
Level 3	18	37
Level 2	45	23
Level 1	35	5

¹ NMSSA reports are based on a nationally representative sample of approximately 2000 students from each of Years 4 and 8.

The NMSSA study showed student attitudes to writing decline between Year 4 and Year 8 as illustrated here. Girls were generally more positive than boys at both year levels, and the difference was similar at both year levels. These disparities were previously also found in the NEMP studies from 1998 to 2006.

The lack of progress in writing from Year 4 to Year 8 could not be attributed to limited access to professional development. The 2012 NMSSA report indicated over 80 percent of Year 4 teachers and 75 percent of Year 8 teachers were involved in professional development and learning focused on writing in the previous 12 months.



What ERO already knows about improving writing in primary schools

Reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 (2009)

Effective teachers inquired into ways of improving their teaching, and worked collaboratively with other staff to share good practice. Effective teachers gave children a purpose for writing and encouraged them to write about things and experiences they were likely to be familiar with. Their teaching was evidence based, deliberate and gave children opportunities to practise new skills and knowledge during the instructional classroom programme. These teachers were adept at using a variety of assessment sources to make judgements about children's literacy progress and achievement. They also applied a 'teaching as inquiry' process to find out what children had already learnt and what changes to make to their teaching, based on what children needed to learn next.

Raising achievement in primary schools: Accelerating Learning in Mathematics (ALiM) and Accelerating Literacy Learning (ALL) (2014)

In schools where teachers' involvement in the ALiM and ALL project had accelerated children's progress:

- > students were active partners in designing their learning plans; they were supported to monitor their own progress; knew what they needed to learn next; and were able to provide feedback about the teaching actions that worked for them

- > parents and whānau were formally invited to be part of the process and were involved in workshops to develop home activities and frequent, regular three-way conferencing in which teachers emphasised progress and success
- > teachers involved knew they were expected to critique the effectiveness of their practice and to make changes; had a willingness to seek both positive and negative evidence of progress; and were open to new practices that would make a difference.

Raising achievement in primary schools (2014)

Successful schools have a long-term strategic commitment to improvement through deliberate, planned actions to accelerate student progress. These effective schools were highly strategic and evaluative when trialling new approaches and innovations. Five capabilities that made a difference in their effectiveness in accelerating student progress were:

- > leadership capability
- > teaching capability
- > assessment and evaluative capability of leaders and teachers
- > leaders' capability to develop relationships with students, parents, whānau, trustees, school leaders and other teaching professionals
- > leaders' and teachers' capability to design and implement a school curriculum that engaged students.

These schools also had a focus on equity and excellence.

Educationally powerful connections with parents and whānau (2015)

In the best instances, teachers involved most parents in setting goals and agreeing on next learning steps with their child. Teachers responded quickly to information obtained from tracking and monitoring student progress and persisted in finding ways to involve all parents of students who were at risk of underachieving, and in finding ways for students to succeed. During conversations with parents and whānau, teachers aimed to learn more about each student in the wider context of school and home, to develop holistic and authentic learning goals and contexts for learning.

Continuity of learning transitions from early childhood services to schools (2015)

Effective transition into school is critical for a child's development of self-worth, confidence, resilience, and ongoing success at school. Schools that were very responsive to making sure children successfully transitioned demonstrated real knowledge about their newly-enrolled children. They took care to translate that knowledge into providing the best possible environment and education for each and every child. Leaders made sure transitions were flexible and tailored to the individual child.

Raising student achievement through targeted actions (2015)

Students benefit from schools identifying their specific needs and creating a plan based on those needs to raise student achievement for all. The most effective schools had a clear understanding which students needed targeted actions to accelerate progress. Teachers' trialled new teaching strategies and monitored their actions to determine if these resulted in positive outcomes for children. A strong commitment to excellence and equity; high quality leadership; the quality of teamwork and professional learning conversations when taking actions; and building school capacity to sustain improvement into the future also contributed to success.

Extending their language – expanding their world: Children's oral language (birth-8 years) (2017)

Supporting oral language learning and development from a very early age is crucial children's literacy learning at school. Early learning services and schools need to position oral language as a formal and intentional part of their curriculum and teaching programmes. Oral language interactions build children's understanding of the meaning of a larger number of words, and of the world around them. Early language skills also predict later academic achievement and success in adult life.

Managing professional learning and development in primary schools (2009)

The extent to which teachers' knowledge and practice improved depended to a large extent on how well the school managed its professional learning and development (PLD) programme. Three of the key features identified in schools where PLD was well managed included:

- > having a good mix of school-led and facilitated professional learning targeted at identified school priorities
- > using observation and feedback effectively to support changes to teacher practice
- > aligning their PLD programmes with school priorities that were informed by analysed student achievement information, and information about teachers' professional needs.

Boards of trustees, principals, senior managers and teachers each have a role in making sure the school's PLD programme successfully effects change in teachers' practice and improves outcomes for students.

Accelerating the progress of priority learners in primary schools (2013)

Highly effective schools demonstrate a well-considered commitment and implement highly effective practices, particularly in classrooms, to accelerate learning. For teachers in these schools 'business as usual' was no longer good enough. Teachers were reflective practitioners who were constantly looking for better ways to improve their student achievement. They understood that when a student was not progressing well, their teaching approaches needed to change.

The report concluded that a system-wide emphasis on the strategies teachers can use to accelerate progress is needed. All teachers have an ethical responsibility to help those students that need to catch up to their peers. This is essential if we are to raise the achievement of New Zealand students relative to their international counterparts.

What we found in the schools focused on writing improvements

Improving achievement

The schools with the greatest improvements in writing achievement in the upper primary school had actively sought professional learning and development (PLD) that specifically targeted the writing aspects they wanted to improve. These schools had a clear understanding of what was already working for their children, what they should retain, and what needed to change. In some cases detailed analysis of writing samples and observations of current teaching practice preceded the selection of the PLD. Literacy leaders had rejected PLD focused on strategies already evident in the school, and instead sought PLD that provided new strategies, and evidence, that children would make accelerated progress.

In some schools, writing improvements began when teachers joined the Ministry of Education's Acceleration Literacy Learning (ALL) project or undertook individual teacher inquiry projects. In these schools teachers trialled new strategies with small groups of children before implementing them more widely across the syndicate or school. Teachers observed practices implemented by literacy leaders before applying them in their own writing programme.

The PLD approaches across the schools varied depending on the needs of the teachers. Some schools catered for teachers' individual needs through a combination of whole-school PLD and flexible workshops and modelling, and made sure every teacher developed confidence with new strategies. Some leaders undertook additional PLD to support them to sustain new practices across the school. Leaders carefully monitored and modelled effective practice in every classroom to support teachers' confidence to implement the new strategies.

Leaders and teachers collaboratively identified new writing strategies and approaches to apply. Leaders recognised the value of every teacher developing an understanding of the progressions children moved through as successful writers. Teachers contributed to agreed goals for improving writing and collaboratively analysed children's writing samples, before developing and following clearly outlined teaching approaches. In many cases, children knew about and regularly referred to the agreed goals and/or progressions. Shared understanding of the writing progressions helped children and teachers know about individuals' writing achievement, progress and next steps.

Developing high quality writing programmes across all levels of the school was a priority in these schools. Leaders wanted to make sure all teachers understood and were able to respond to the different stages children move through to become successful writers. Teachers introduced deliberate teaching strategies for Year 1 children to make sure they were confident with foundation writing skills. A balance of formal and informal writing opportunities in Year 1 allowed young children to choose authentic writing activities, helped to develop their phonemic awareness, and provided opportunities to learn and write about a wide range of contexts. Children were well supported to master more complex writing tasks as they moved through the school.

In some of the schools, board trustees made well-informed decisions about actions to improve writing. Trustees received comprehensive information about writing programmes, successes, issues and the actions put in place to support children who were still below expectation. In some cases they met with and questioned a selected PLD provider before committing funds. Trustees also allocated additional resources to fund release time for literacy leaders to mentor teachers and model good practice. Trustees also received ongoing information about the leader's role and outcomes of the actions they led.

Other approaches and strategies observed:

- > working closely with parents to help them understand what the child was learning at school and; to determine the child's interests and achievements at home and how these interests could further contribute to the child's writing
- > working with the secondary school most children went to next to find out how well writing programmes were preparing children for their next stage in learning. Sharing the teaching approaches between the primary and secondary schools to help teachers in each school understand what came before and what came next for children as they developed as confident writers
- > making clear for children the links between reading, speaking and writing. In some cases, oral language had a significant focus during the writing programme. In other instances young children's learning about letter formation, sounds and words were deliberately combined as part of early reading and writing teaching strategies
- > deliberately emphasising the craft of writing to help children better organise their ideas. Children made considerable progress through learning more about the structure of a sentence, a paragraph, and an essay
- > carefully planning learning activities across the breadth of the curriculum to reinforce new writing skills, and making sure children understood how to apply strategies learned during writing time to all writing activities across the school day.

In most of the schools, leaders and teachers recognised they already had some effective instructional teaching of writing strategies that worked for many of their children. They avoided abandoning things that already worked, and also added new things they wanted to trial. This meant reducing some activities, such as daily diaries, to allow time to teach the new strategies. In the schools where the most progress was made, teachers were energised by their students' success and reported they enjoyed teaching writing more now than in previous years.

Challenges with writing achievement

In some schools, ERO found making and sustaining improvements in writing was extremely challenging. In these schools, despite leaders and teachers focusing on improving writing for consecutive years (or longer), progress was minimal or not sustained. Leaders in these schools acknowledged the ALL project had usefully increased their focus on target children in their school, and PLD had encouraged teachers to concentrate on improving their own practice when children were not achieving well. However, their literacy leaders were unable to find and implement strategies that made significant improvements for children below or well below expectations in writing. One principal reported his teachers' frustration levels were such they did not want to undertake further writing PLD until they could be shown strategies that worked for their children.

In some of the schools, teachers had implemented a considerable number of well-considered changes to their writing programmes that had made little difference for their target students. In a small number of these schools, ERO identified a mismatch between the writing issues the children identified and the programmes provided. For example, interviews with children below expectation identified difficulties with skills such as spelling, punctuation, using a dictionary, word choices, organising ideas and fixing mistakes. However, their teachers were encouraged to focus on different aspects of writing, such as understanding different genre; using similes, metaphor, and alliteration; and using increasingly complex language. The ALL project approach where teachers in each school were expected to do something different to accelerate students' progress in writing had not worked in these schools. Teachers needed more support to access research, and PLD proven to work for children not achieving well in writing.

Some schools overly relied on normative writing assessments while ignoring the rich ongoing assessment information they collected. These teachers had established comprehensive self-assessment systems where children understood what they needed to work on and provided evidence of their mastery of the related skill multiple times. However, teachers still insisted on children undertaking regular asTTle assessments that require considerable teacher time to moderate and establish a perceived writing level. The information provided through children's ongoing self assessment provided more accurate information about what the child

could do as this information considered a variety of writing samples rather than a single writing task. Further unintended consequences from an over reliance on normative writing assessments were that:

- > the child's involvement in the self-assessment process was devalued
- > the writing levels established from one moderated writing sample may indicate the child was working at a lower level than the evidence-based self-assessment information showed, which could demotivate children.

Leaders and teachers should recognise the value of and use the evidence from children's self assessment to establish school-wide trends, their next teaching steps, and children's progress and achievement in writing.

This report outlines how teachers in some schools changed their practices to use new teaching of writing strategies. They moved away from the focus on learning about different genre each time and emphasised the craft and structure of language and writing. In most cases this meant dropping some of their previous practices and assumptions, and learning more about what makes a successful writer. Leaders carefully made improvements across the year levels to make sure children were supported to enjoy and succeed in writing. It was not about doing more in writing; it was about evaluating what was working, and discarding things that demotivated children and got in the way of their learning.

The writing approaches and strategies that worked

In the following pages we share the narratives of six schools. Some share developments to improve writing achievement for children in all year levels. Other schools made improvements in specific year levels.

01

Transforming teaching to introduce skills for current and future writing success

NORTHCROSS INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL
AUCKLAND

- > professional development and support for teachers
- > trialing and early implementation
- > the programme in action
- > focusing on outcomes and improvements
- > working with another school to support students

02

Using targeted approaches to improve teaching

PAPAKURA CENTRAL SCHOOL
AUCKLAND

- > planning for writing professional development
- > teachers' self reflection and professional discussion
- > extending writing opportunities
- > students understanding their learning
- > a focus on oral language

03

Using a structured process to teach non-fiction writing

EAST TAIERI SCHOOL
DUNEDIN

- > Year 1 writers
 - > writing in Years 3 and 4
 - > Years 5 and 6 writers
 - > benefits of the process
-

04

Making sure all teachers have the knowledge to enable literacy success for every child

HOKOWHITU SCHOOL
PALMERSTON NORTH

- > reducing the need for withdrawal from class for literacy interventions
- > making deliberate connections between reading and writing in Years 1 and 2
- > working with parents
- > success for children whose English is their second or other language
- > the writing approaches that already worked in Years 4 to 6
- > the new approach to support children not achieving well in writing

05

Focusing everyone on agreed writing goals

ORATIA SCHOOL
AUCKLAND

- > trustees' response to achievement challenges
- > working with parents
- > children's understanding of goals and targets

06

Understanding writing progressions across the school

FAIRFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL
HAMILTON

- > professional development
 - > writing progressions
 - > other instructional writing strategies
-

01

Transforming teaching to introduce skills for current and future writing success

ERO's 2014 report *Raising achievement in primary schools* highlighted the following important capabilities that made a difference in schools' effectiveness to respond to underachievement:

- > the leadership capability to design and implement a coherent whole-school plan focused on targeted support for students and teachers for equitable outcomes
- > the teaching capability to find and trial responses to individual student strengths and needs that engaged and supported students to accelerate their progress in reading, writing and mathematics
- > the assessment and evaluative capability of leaders and teachers to understand and use data, and know what works, when and why for different students.

Leaders and teachers at **NORTHCROSS INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL** effectively managed all three capabilities to improve writing achievement for many students.

Although students at Northcross Intermediate School generally achieved well in reading and mathematics, leaders and teachers had been concerned about writing achievement for some time. Teachers had attempted to improve children's writing by giving them skills to better manage the identified aspects that needed to improve. However, ongoing assessments showed progress was not as rapid as hoped. Many children still had difficulty with sentence and paragraph construction, and other surface features. Teachers knew they needed to do something different.

In 2014, the board of trustees funded 0.5 FTE release for a leader responsible for teaching English (literacy leader) to find ways to accelerate progress in writing. That leader and others facilitated some professional learning and development (PLD) as part of the Ministry of Education's Accelerating Literacy Learning (ALL) project and took the opportunity to take a fresh look at the issue. The literacy leader actively searched for strategies that would improve writing across the school.

This narrative shares the successful strategies and approaches they subsequently discovered, trialled and implemented.

Literacy leaders attended a variety of PLD focused on different writing genre and engaging students in writing. They recognised much of what was suggested was already evident in the school. Through assessment information they identified achievement gaps with surface features, and sentence and paragraph structure. They needed to add new components to their writing programmes.

During their search for such new components, a Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLb) told them of a programme that appeared to focus on what their children needed. Although the programme, Write that Essay (WTE), was designed for secondary school students, the leader and teachers saw that it could easily be adapted to make improvements for Years 7 and 8 children. Dr Ian Hunter, the programme author, was invited to speak with all the literacy leaders and the senior management team before the board of trustees made the decision to invest in whole-school PLD from the beginning of 2016.

“”

Before finding 'Write that Essay' we were already focused on upskilling teachers in writing. We were moving away from a focus on genre and had interventions in place for learners below expectation. We had recognised that our focus on genre, frequent asTTle testing, and a lack of a clear direction about writing for teachers was not giving us the desired outcomes. We were almost overwhelmed with a huge amount about pedagogy, but [we] had little idea of all the actual nuts and bolts needed for children to become a good writer, or what teachers needed to improve their practice.

Literacy leader

It was hoped WTE would provide transferable writing skills to better prepare students for secondary schooling and beyond. The programme's focus on sentence and paragraph structure fitted well with the problem areas the school had identified. The programme focused on:

- > structure
- > sentence style
- > coherence
- > fluency
- > logic
- > analysis
- > precision
- > clarity
- > focus
- > argumentation
- > conciseness.

Professional development and support for teachers

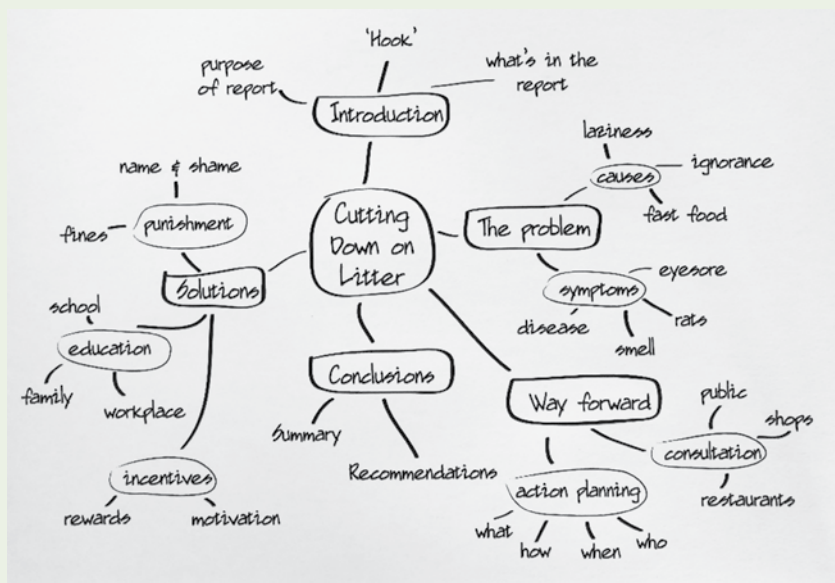
The WTE writing PLD began at the beginning of the school year when Dr Hunter worked with the whole staff. Teachers wrote for short periods and then critiqued their work using some new criteria. By having teachers behave as students, they readily identified their own strengths and misunderstandings. Teachers initially found this quite confronting, but the PLD facilitator quickly provided them with practices to use in the classroom to overcome any misunderstandings.

▶ In one of the PLD activities, the teachers were asked to plan for their writing and then write about their chosen topics. Most planned by recording their ideas on different 'mind maps' like the one shown here. A few wrote a short list of possible content related to their topic.

At the end of the activity, it was determined the teachers who had written short lists had covered considerably more in the time allowed than those who had used mind maps.

The facilitator pointed out that often children had too many ideas in their planning phase. If they were already used to planning using formats like mind maps, they shouldn't necessarily abandon something they may have done for years. Instead they should be encouraged to select only their three best ideas, concentrate on those and save the others for another time. It was explained that when children had too many ideas they could often find it difficult to start writing or develop their thinking logically.

When they generated a lot of ideas they also felt compelled to use all those ideas in their writing. This resulted in writing that lacked depth and only touched the surface of their many ideas due to their attempts to include everything. This was particularly evident during timed writing samples and assessments.



By the end of the PLD day, teachers realised they needed to change the way they taught writing. Each committed to their own personal plan for improvement. Teachers told ERO that during the PLD they were given teaching strategies to improve sentence and paragraph structure they could use straight away in their class from the beginning of the new school year. Teachers immediately used some of the mini lessons they had participated in themselves. One teacher told ERO some children had said “Wow, why didn’t someone teach me that before”.

Teachers were provided with short assessments to quickly identify which aspects their students had mastered or needed to improve. The assessment tool (the Writer’s Scorecard) designed by WTE provided an overall snapshot of children’s strengths and weaknesses over time. Leaders felt the visual tool was quicker and easier to interpret than the asTTle writing rubric they used for more formal assessments. Teachers were able to investigate the causes of each student’s gaps and the aspects they had already mastered.

Teachers appreciated they didn’t have to completely reinvent their writing programmes to make a difference. Along with their students, they had the skills to decide on the writing contexts, and they were able to adapt some motivation and engagement processes the children were already familiar with.

Trialing and early implementation

Leaders used a variety of strategies to support teachers to implement the new writing programme. Before beginning the PLD, leaders had begun increasing learning conversations and relationships with teachers by mentoring and modelling practices in each classroom. During the early implementation phase they separated mentoring, modelling and observation of writing programmes from appraisal activities. Leaders wanted to make it clear observations of writing lessons were entirely for mentoring and support.

The support provided for teachers was differentiated to cater for their different needs. Some teachers only needed the WTE resource book and software resources to understand and implement new practices. Others wanted workshops and opportunities to observe other teachers' practices. Leaders surveyed teachers and ran targeted workshops teachers could opt into. Leaders worked across the teaching teams to help improve their practice, and check the impact of the new teaching.

Collaboration across the school increased. One team gave 30 percent of their writing samples to another team to remoderate their marking to check their judgement about achievement. Leaders shared planning for school-wide activities. For example, they prepared a module for teachers to use when students were writing and presenting speeches.

During early implementation, the literacy leader also sought greater leadership collaboration. The leader recognised working alone as a leader might not have been the best model. The board then allocated funding for another teacher to have one day's release each week to work with the literacy leader.

“”

Having a job share was so much more productive. We challenged each other to new ways of supporting teachers. The teacher was also able to trial things in her classroom. Other teachers were then able to observe her practice and extend the teaching strategies in their own classes.

Literacy leader

Co-leadership also increased the sustainability of practices. For example, if one teacher left for study or another teaching position, the other leader could continue with the agreed direction.

Each stage of the implementation was carefully planned and guided by literacy leaders from each teaching team. Examples of part of the PLD and guidance and review for each team's literacy leader are shown on the following page.

February

Over the next few weeks we ask that you go back to your team and show them the following:

- > how to log in as a teacher
- > how to get their students to log in
- > hand out teacher and student user manuals
- > brief overview of the dashboard and help
- > explore the modules and have a look at what is available.
See below for the modules that you will use lesson plans over the next few weeks
- > explore the activities function and teach the sentence activity below.

We acknowledge that most of you will be capable (on a personal basis) of using many more of the website functions-you are very welcome to do this on an individual basis. However, your main focus is to get your team members up and running with the basics mentioned above.

Suggested modules:

- > Basics-Sentence Design – The Sentence as a Train
- > Developing-Sentence Design – Simple Sentence
- > Proficient-Sentence Design – Red, White and Blue
- > Proficient-Sentence Design – Very short
- > Proficient-Sentence Design – W-start

May

Progress so far for each teaching team was shared. In the first 3 weeks of Term 2, we ask that you go back to your team and show them the following:

- > how to preview, draft, assign, and send an assignment.
Know where to find the video and PDF which supports this (HELP section), should you or any of your team require further assistance in sending an assignment
- > how to share an assignment with colleagues within NX

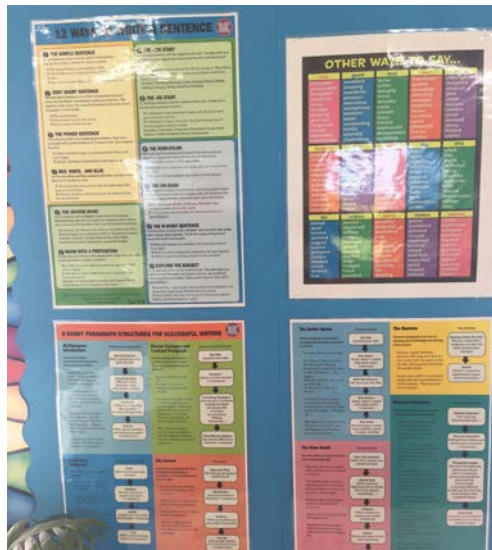
The best way to get good at creating assignments is to practice. With this in mind, we are asking that every classroom teacher create and share an assignment in Write that Essay. This will provide a bank of resources that we can all benefit from.

Leaders continued to trial further changes. All teachers had both hardcopy and online resources that outlined the new approaches in detail. However, teachers in 12 classrooms were also chosen to access the online tools that came with the programme. Leaders trialed this approach as they wanted to check whether students benefitted from the online tools before committing to additional financial costs. The overwhelmingly positive responses from teachers and students resulted in online access for every classroom.

Leaders also organised and ran a well-attended parent evening about the changes. A person from *Write that Essay* spoke about its benefits and how it could be used at home to advance children's writing skills. A leader from each teaching team showed how children could use online learning modules to focus on individual learning gaps. The parent evening was designed to show the changes as a whole-school approach to improving children's composition skills to meet the demands of the curriculum at Years 7 and 8 and in the future.

The programme in action

The leaders and teachers developed a two-year plan to introduce writing skills progressively to children. They also taught children to use the online resources and module independently and in groups. Most teams offered targeted workshops students opted into depending on the skills they needed to develop next. In some cases students were guided by teachers to attend a particular workshop. Children were then given lots of opportunities to use their writing skills across the curriculum, both within their class and in extension activities.



ERO visited three classrooms to see the programmes in action. In each classroom, the children were highly engaged and enthusiastic about their progress.

In the first classroom, the children showed ERO a few of the warm-up activities they did before writing each day to help them recall the strategies they should use. They usually did one warm-up activity each day but demonstrated more for ERO.

A Year 7 class had many writing strategies displayed around the room. Children also used a large variety of charts, cards, and pictures to support their writing. The teacher told ERO he was considerably more confident teaching writing now. The PLD, resources for children and texts for teachers had made it really clear what children needed. He had learnt lots about the nuts and bolts of writing and had really enjoyed seeing the children make such great progress.

In the first activity, each group of children raced to write down as many different sentence types as they could recall. Children worked together in groups of four to try to recall the 12 different sentence types they had learnt.

They then played *adverb dominoes* where everyone in the class stood and was randomly selected to say an adverb. The first child said an adverb and pointed to another child and then sat down. They achieved their goal to have everyone contribute a different adverb in less than one minute.

Next a leader from each group of four (tribal captains) had 10 seconds to pick a photograph from a selection of photos displayed on a table. They then had a short timeframe to write three sentences using adverbs related to the context of the picture. Later they shared their best sentence with their group and the best sentence from each group was shared and critiqued by the whole class.

In the final warm up, the teachers read out sentences and the groups had to locate the prepositions. The children did this as a quiz activity. When they shared their answers they fully discussed any contradictions or the reasons for their selections.

At the end of the warm ups, the teacher asked the children to decide what they had trouble with as a class and what they should work on tomorrow.



The children quickly engaged in all the activities. They seemed to enjoy writing tasks with short time frames and specified word limits. The children ERO spoke to were enthusiastic about their improvements.

“”

I wasn't a good writer last year. This year I have a lot of knowledge about good sentences, paragraphs and writing and that has made me a good writer.

I was always an okay writer but now I am much better. Our teacher gives us challenging things to do with words and has helped us know when we can do things to make writing better. I still have a lot to improve though.

Students

Children in another class were participating in a workshop focused on writing great paragraphs. They were using knowledge they had gained about godwits while working with ecology experts on a recent camp. Many of the class had been reluctant writers.

The children working with the teacher started by writing one paragraph together. They used a structure where they had to share different features in each of the four sentences. For example, they focused on the first sentence as the topic sentences and revised how the third sentence needed evidence to support what their earlier sentences were saying. Children were asked to recall what the scientists had shared with them previously to contribute to the paragraph.



After completing the paragraph, the children were asked to decide if they were confident to do the next paragraph. The teacher continued to work with those who were unsure, while the rest of the groups worked with a peer, or independently to either improve the paragraph written by the group or write a next paragraph.

The other children in the class that were not in the workshops practised what they had learnt in a recent workshop or did writing of their own choice. Children ERO spoke with had selected a variety of writing activities including:

- > a scary story
- > a recipe with all the steps to follow
- > a script.

Children were sharing what they had done through Google Docs. They talked about how sometimes they changed their writing to fit in other children's advice and ideas. The children enthusiastically explained how much they had progressed that year.

“”

At the end of Year 7, I was 3a [asTTLe] and now near the end of Year 8, I am 4a. I am enjoying writing more as I know more about writing skills. I also like writing about what I want to write about.

I was 3a but now I am 3p. I am working harder and I know more about things like introductions and how to expand paragraphs.

Year 8 Students

ERO observed a group of children in a modern learning environment, involved in a writing workshop targeted at Level 5 of *The New Zealand Curriculum*.

The Years 7 and 8 children all had detailed *I can* sheets they used to understand the writing strategies they needed to master and record when and how they had successfully used a strategy in their writing. Children inserted the actual sentence or piece of writing as evidence of their mastery. The sheets differed to match each child's writing levels. An example from one of the *I can* sheets is shown here.

Types of sentences	Example	Your sentence
If you find you waffle a bit, try the Power Sentence . Begin your paragraph with a Power Sentence of 12 words or less.	Bees are essential for pollination.	
Start a sentence with an adverb: it adds interest and intrigue. Remember the rule: when you start your sentence with an adverb, place a comma after the adverb then write the rest of the sentence.	Remarkably, in the past the Waikato River was clean and rubbish free.	

The children and their teacher were using the software purchased as part of the programme. It monitored and differentiated the writing programme depending on each child's strengths and needs.

“”

The teacher can see what we need to learn next. She sets the tasks and workshops different lessons kids need by looking at gaps in the 'I can' sheets. We then book a workshop and the teacher sends us the task we will cover in the workshop. We open the task when we go to the workshop.

Year 7 Student

The children used devices linked to the smartboard and the teacher's laptop. The teacher was able to see moment-by-moment what the children were writing.

The lesson was highly focused and concentrated on children crafting their writing by reducing the use of pronouns to better engage the reader. Initially the children shared their most powerful sentence from the previous day's work before looking at a pronoun chart to make sure they all fully understood what a pronoun was. The teacher displayed seven key words or phrases they had to use in a paragraph and they discussed some possibilities to include in the next writing task. Children were given 10 minutes for the task and were able to work with a peer if they wished. Most chose to write independently.

The teacher used a laptop to see what each child was writing, the edits they made, and how confident they were with the current learning intention. She was able to give real-time written feedback to children as they worked.

Later the children shared some sentences orally. As the teacher had already seen what some of the children were writing, she was able to prompt individuals to share particular high-quality examples. Any sentences that still contained a pronoun were displayed on the smartboard and children suggested new ways to construct them. The children also considered whether the new way had caused a change in tense. The group was then given two minutes to finish the task.

At the end of the lesson, the group reflected on the ways that eliminating the pronoun improved their writing. The children all received a follow-up task digitally that allowed them to practise that learning intention independently the next day.



I am now more cautious about how I write because I know what is expected. I get good feedback that tells me my next steps.

I like booking workshops and having the lessons tailored to what I need.

Student

The teacher explained that a lot of the writing modules have videos and quizzes the students could use. This allowed for flipped learning where the students could learn a new strategy before attending a workshop with the teacher.

Other changes were made across the school as the new teaching approaches were implemented. These included:

- > bringing the extension and many of the remedial writing programmes back into the classroom
- > changing the writing focus to audience and purpose
- > increasing opportunities for children to recognise different types of writing as part of their reading programmes
- > reducing the number of writing reflections children did from daily to weekly to allow more time for the actual writing and crafting.

Focusing on outcomes and improvements

Before and during the changes, leaders used achievement data and information from student and teacher surveys to determine the impact of the changes.

In one teaching team, students' surveys identified over 70 percent of children in the team believed their writing had improved that year. A further 27 percent were not sure about their progress. The children in the team identified the writing workshops had helped their writing the most.

Before the changes, teacher responses to survey questions highlighted an overwhelming need for help with their writing programmes. At the end of the first year of the new programme, leaders gained teachers' perspectives about their confidence with teaching writing by designing a short online survey. They were interested in the following:

- > how they felt about teaching writing
- > the tools they used
- > the perceived progress of their learners.

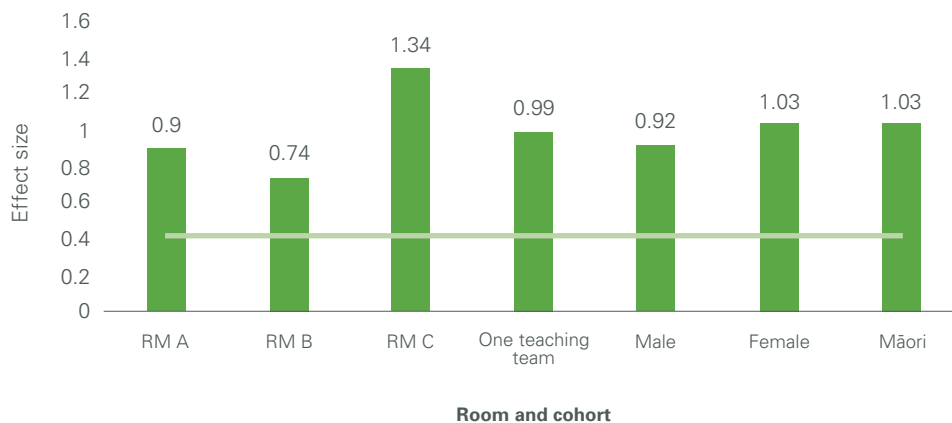
Some of the positives teachers identified were:

- > increased confidence with, and a renewed interest in, the teaching of writing
- > a greater understanding of using writing skills more widely across the curriculum
- > support for the more positive focus on high quality writing expectations
- > the benefits of having a common language to use when teaching and critiquing writing
- > the focus on targeted individual children's writing needs.

Teachers also identified further emphasis should be placed on working with parents. This had resulted in the parent evening held in the second year. Successes and problems with the software also surfaced and were included in a '*where to next*' plan for the following year.

Teaching teams experimented with different ways to monitor achievement trends. Below are the results for one teaching team in the second year of implementation. Teachers were able to identify where the biggest gains were occurring, where additional support was needed, and which practices resulted in the largest achievement gains.

One teaching team Y8 cohort (74 students) writing effect size 2017



Teachers continued to do three moderated asTTle writing assessments during the first year and reduced it to two assessments in the following year. When ERO visited, leaders were considering how they could reduce these assessments further by using the information from the students' *I can* sheets more in the future.

Considerable improvements in achievement were evident. In the first year the improvements across the school, when comparing beginning and end of year work samples, showed an 0.88 effect size. ERO was provided with a large number of writing samples showing these improvements.

At the beginning of the first year, about 58 percent of students were working below Level 4 of the curriculum. Forty percent were working at Level 3 and 19 percent were at Level 2.

At the end of the first year, three percent of students were working at Level 2.

Twenty two percent were achieving at Level 3 of the curriculum.

Twenty three percent were working at Level 5 or Level 6 of the curriculum.

Many children had made significant progress in writing. About 41 percent of the children had improved by three or more asTTle sublevels,² or one level of the curriculum. Eleven percent had improved by more than five asTTle sublevels. However, about 16 percent of children didn't progress two or more sublevels. The school continued to fund release time for a literacy leader to promote ongoing improvements for all children.



Our emphasis is not on mediocrity. We want to produce outstanding writers. We have seen that our programme is now helping our reluctant writers, our English as a second and other languages students (ESOL), and our extension writers.

Principal

² asTTle scores are calibrated to report against three sublevels of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (basic, proficient and advanced). It is reasonable for a student to progress through three sublevels in two years. However, when a student needs to accelerate progress it is realistic for teachers and students to set a goal to move up by two sublevels in a year.

Working with another school to support students

Part of Northcross Intermediate's review and development included a focus on students' success in Year 9. During recent years, the school's senior management team met with Year 9 students once they had settled into the local secondary school. As about 94 percent of their students went to that secondary school, they were able to track the progress of many of their students.

In 2016 the feedback from Year 9 former students' identified that although some were able to write a comprehensive essay, most were not able to. This information was passed on to the literacy leaders at Northcross Intermediate. The head of junior English at the secondary school suggested teachers work together to better prepare Northcross Intermediate learners for the English and other curriculum demands at secondary school. At the first meeting a variety of specific areas to work on were determined by the literacy leaders from both schools. These included improving writing surface features and formal writing.

The head of department (HOD) responsible for English, and some other teachers of English joined a whole-school staff meeting of Northcross Intermediate teachers in the third term of 2017. The focus was on gaining a better understanding of National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) requirements, and a clearer picture of what children needed to be able to do before they arrived at secondary school. Literacy leaders at both schools also had further opportunities to meet and a teacher swap was planned for late 2017. Some of the intermediate's teachers visited the secondary school for a morning, and observed and helped in teaching classes. Some of the secondary school teachers visited Northcross Intermediate and did the same. Both schools reported benefits from seeing children taught at another year level.

The benefits of the PLD and the links between the two schools were evident for the next group of Year 9 students. In early 2018, leaders at Northcross Intermediate received feedback on literacy achievement. The head of junior English commented on the Northcross Intermediate students' literacy foundation. She had seen a marked improvement in writing skills over the past two years. Subsequently, the literacy leader from Northcross Intermediate has established a similar collaboration with another secondary school in their area.



We believe that the links we have been able to make with our secondary schools, combined with the Write that Essay Programme, have been powerful levers of change for us.

Literacy leader

02

Using targeted approaches to improve writing

ERO's report *Managing professional learning and development in primary schools (2009)* concluded the extent to which teachers' knowledge and practice improves depended to a large extent on how well the school managed its professional learning and development (PLD) programmes. Three key features identified in schools where PLD was well managed included:

- > having a good mix of school led and facilitated professional learning targeted at identified school priorities
- > using observation and feedback effectively to support changes to teacher practice
- > aligning PLD programmes with school priorities informed by analysed student achievement information, and information about teachers' professional needs.

These features were clearly evident in **PAPAKURA CENTRAL SCHOOL'S** PLD introduced to improve writing.

Writing PLD for every teacher at the school began in 2015, and followed whole school reading development. At that time, although achievement data identified more children were achieving to the correct reading level by Year 6, less than half of the children in the school had reached the correct writing level for their age.

School leaders were successful in joining a Ministry of Education writing development contract to bring about improvements at all year levels. In the first year, an external facilitator closely supported literacy leaders in the school, and in 2016 the school's literacy leaders continued the developments.

The carefully planned and implemented PLD focused on teaching strategies and approaches leaders identified would contribute to improved writing outcomes for children.

Planning for writing professional development

The facilitator and literacy leaders identified and analysed teachers' strengths and needs before planning and implementing the PLD. Observations of writing lessons in every class focused on evaluating teachers' confidence with the following teaching strategies:

- > explaining the purpose of the lesson
- > making effective use of learning intentions and success criteria
- > creating opportunities for children to discuss or explain what they were learning
- > introducing visualisation strategies to create mental images before writing
- > enabling opportunities for additional teaching for groups of children needing further support to practise a specific writing skill
- > having teachers use effective questioning skills.



Observing the teaching of writing

Analysis of findings from the observations of writing lessons identified many teachers were successfully helping children make connections between reading and writing, using and displaying learning intentions and success criteria, and encouraging and using paired and shared writing. Possible development needs were to:

- > have all learning intentions focus on the writing skill rather than the task
- > promote more modelling of writing skills in ways children could refer to later (modelling books)
- > increase opportunities for small group teaching for children needing to accelerate their progress
- > increase the use of open questions to help capture children's prior knowledge and extend their ideas.

Leaders shared the analysis with staff and clarified next steps for development. The resulting professional development focused on development needs and increasing teachers' understanding of the writing skills children develop as they move through the year levels. Teachers also:

- > shared different writing tools they used
- > spent considerable time examining and discussing writing progressions
- > participated in moderation sessions to increase consistency when assessing children's writing samples.

At the same time as teachers engaged in writing PLD, literacy leaders learnt how to support teachers to develop content knowledge and the practices required to improve children's writing. The facilitator's mentoring increased leaders' confidence to undertake focused observations and professional practice discussions. Leaders also introduced systems to increase teachers' capacity to reflect on their own teaching practice.

Teachers' self reflection and professional discussions

Leaders carefully and gradually introduced the practice of teachers' videoing their own writing lessons, to foster ongoing self reflection and improvement. Initially, two teachers volunteered to trial the new practice and reported back to other teachers before leaders extended the practice across the school. An observation and self reflection sheet teachers completed before the videoed lesson and reflection after the lesson asked them to identify the following:

- > the purpose of the lesson
- > how well the purpose and the learning intention were shared with the children
- > the explicit links to prior world and literacy knowledge
- > the explicit teaching of writing processes, language structures and vocabulary
- > the effective teaching points to include in the lesson and how clear they were for children
- > how well they catered for children's diverse needs.

Teachers used the self reflection sheets to identify their strengths and next steps. They discussed these with a literacy leader before setting a development goal for the teacher. Teachers were highly reflective and identified useful and challenging improvement goals for themselves.

Later, teachers highlighted their developing confidence with supporting children needing to accelerate their progress (i.e. target students) by videoing small group writing lessons. Generally teachers became more explicit about the purpose of the lesson as they practised preparing for their video sessions.

Here is an example of an observation and reflection form completed after a teacher recorded and analysed a targeted writing lesson:

Teacher:	Class:	Year Level: 5/6
Target and focus students' names:		
What are students learning today?	How to choose supporting detail carefully to expand/elaborate their main idea.	
Why are students learning this?	They are not yet writing proper paragraphs or providing enough supporting detail in their writing when they give an idea.	
Main strategies to be used	Using graphic organiser, teacher modelling, buddy discussions	
Particular aspect of the lesson (of my practice) that I want to focus on?	Are my target students engaging or are some fidgeting as they do sometimes?	
How will I know that students have been successful?	<p>When their plan shows at least 2 or 3 related points they plan to include in a paragraph that supports the main idea.</p> <p>When their writing reflects ideas that are grouped with more than one sentence to a paragraph and all ideas relate.</p>	
How will students know they have been successful?	When they can read their writing and it includes all the detail in the plan and the ideas relate so sentences do not stand alone.	
Self reflection questions post video:		
<p>> How well did I met the focus identified from the last observation? It doesn't feel like the focus was met, children were not able to spend enough time sharing their own thinking.</p> <p>> Was this the right learning for these students to help them progress. How do you know?</p> <p>It was the right learning because they were writing random sentences that didn't flow. XXXX (one child) is now organising his ideas better and he needs another focus.</p>		

Extending writing opportunities



Focusing on writing skills across the curriculum

Teachers recognised children could accelerate their improvements in writing by writing more than once each school day. The carefully planned five week teaching units helped children transfer skills learnt during writing time to other contexts covered during the day. The units related to a specific topic or context. Teachers identified the learning needs of groups of children and the writing skills they would like them to achieve in the five weeks. Teachers then back mapped to identify the stages they would work through to master a skill. Teachers also identified possible learning intentions and success criteria to help set goals with the children.

During a healthy living unit, one writing group focused on learning to sequence their ideas while another identified the features of text type. Both groups were involved in making posters, writing reports, instructional writing and writing recipes. The deliberate teaching points for each group were the main focus of the unit plan and the context was secondary.

“

We got teachers to focus on the learning first and the topic second. They had to work together to think about:

- this is where we want to be in five weeks
- how we are going to get there
- what the steps are we need to take.

We had originally tried doing the back mapping and goal setting with children for just a three week period but we found this was too short a time. It also may have eventually led to less challenging and purposeful goals.

Leaders


Students understanding their learning

Teachers introduced new processes to increase children's understanding of what they were learning and actions to improve. These also helped children understand both their own role and their teachers' role in helping them reach their goals. Goals, success criteria and actions were set with each learning group at the beginning of the unit. In goal setting records were agreed and displayed for the children. Teachers recorded the name of the child who had suggested the success criteria to encourage more children to contribute their ideas. The children and teachers then also suggested actions the teacher should take to support them to achieve the goal.



Deliberate sharing of writing strategies

Below are partially completed records of two goals for a group of Years 3 and 4 students. The asterisk denotes ideas suggested by a child.

Learning Goal: Write in paragraphs	Learning Goal: Editing to improve my writing		
<p>How I know I've been successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > use topic sentence at the beginning of the sentence > give examples in the middle of the paragraph > use a concluding sentence at the end of the paragraph > use complex sentences* > use punctuation correctly like speech marks and commas.* 	<p>How I know I've been successful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > check our work makes sense > do buddy editing > give feedback > use two stars and a wish* <div data-bbox="810 831 1272 1003"> <p>Two stars and a wish</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>★</td><td>★</td></tr> </table> <p></p> </div>	★	★
★	★		
<p>What Miss XXX will do to help us achieve the goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > let us do free writing like story writing* > share good examples of what a paragraph should look like* > give us inspiration* > help us with spelling once we have checked our spelling* > teach us dictionary skills.* 	<p>What Miss XXX will do to help us achieve the goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > help us use complex sentences to make our writing better* > give us new words to try out in our writing* > give us interesting adjectives to make our writing more interesting* > use icons when we are marking our work 		
<p>What I'll do to achieve the goal</p>	<p>What I'll do to achieve the goal</p>		
<p>What my writing will look like when I achieve the goal</p>	<p>What my writing will look like when I achieve the goal</p>		

Teachers also sought students' perceptions of their own writing ability and interests. Early in the year teachers supported children to answer questions about their writing. Years 3 and 4 children answered the following questions. They selected the appropriate word shown in bold font when they recorded their views.

- > I really **do / don't** enjoy writing because...
- > What do you like to do during writing time?
- > Do you think you are a good writer **yes / no**? Why do you think this?
- > What do you find hard in writing?
- > What types of writing do you like doing?
- > What would you like to get better at in writing?
- > What helps you learn in writing?

Children often identified how they liked free writing and writing about videos. Many said they had had difficulty writing complex sentences and using punctuation correctly. Children also highlighted their preferences for working with a buddy or working alone. Children's responses were analysed to contribute to planning writing activities and grouping children with similar learning needs.

ERO spoke with some Years 3 and 4 children who told us what they were learning about and what they liked doing in writing.

“”

We are taught about complex sentences and told not to be scared about using some big words.

We learn how to connect sentences and make them into more complex sentences.

I have learnt how to add more adjectives with my verbs so I can make my writing more interesting so others will want to read it without putting them to sleep.

I like making up stories when we are given some sentence starts. I wrote a good story from the sentence starter *"The scary house rattled as..."*

I like independent story time when we get to show how creative we can be when we think outside of the box.

I like being able to use a variety of subjects. We get given different tasks and nobody has to do the same.

We are pretty confident that all the kids in our class will reach the right level. We know that because we have these things that show what we have to be able to do, and we fill it in and check it ourselves (the child showed the self assessment sheet to the ERO evaluator).

Students

A focus on oral language

Teachers realised a greater focus on oral language could help increase opportunities for children to discuss or explain what they were learning, and with their use of visualisation strategies to create mental images before writing. This was especially important for children in Years 1 and 2 who were not confidently using their background knowledge, or writing about a wider variety of life experiences. Teachers also sought to extend children's spoken and written vocabulary through good questioning and discussion about contexts children were familiar with. The observation below highlights the focus on oral language to extend children's ideas during a writing lesson for Year 1 students.

The teacher explained to the children they were going to write about summer. First she read a poem about winter to share a similar context. Initially children were asked to close their eyes and think about summer and doing things on warm days.

Children were very enthusiastic about an activity they called *Peer Sharing*. First they walked around the mat space and high fived another child who then became the partner they sat with. The children shared what they like doing in summer with their partner. The children already knew they were expected to share their partner's thoughts later. Some showed a real sense of purpose by asking their partner questions so they could understand what they were going to share. The teacher noticed one pair of children were not sharing and reminded them of the question. They then shared their thoughts.

Later, two pairs worked together to hear about each other's summer activities. Almost every child talked confidently in their group. The teacher noticed one child did not want to share and suggested the children in that group ask questions. The child then contributed their ideas.

The teacher brought the groups back together. Children's suggestions about fun summer activities were discussed and recorded in the writing modelling book. The teacher expected children to use full sentences when they shared their ideas with her. Generally most children used full sentences without reminders. The teacher then quickly put some of the key words the children had provided into two lists. Some children were excited to explain that one list was doing words and one list was about things. Some children reminded their peers they were called verbs and nouns.

The teacher then extended children's ideas by having them think of and share amazing words that reminded them about summer – what you see and what you feel. The teacher recorded the lists of words in the modelling book. The teacher's questioning helped children think of more interesting summer activities such as surfing or snorkelling in the sea, or making things in the sand at the beach.

The teacher then worked with one writing group while the other children completed drawing and writing activities about summer. Before the children began their independent task they discussed what it would look like for them to have

successfully completed it. They decided the success criterion was “*we will have drawn pictures of what is in our head and will have used describing words*”. They had a blank page with four boxes to draw in four summer activities and write three interesting words about summer. The children frequently referred to ideas discussed in their groups or recorded in the teacher’s modelling book.

Meanwhile the teacher worked with two smaller groups of children. The first group went back to the poem about winter and used their sentences to make a poem about summer using the same format. Between each of the group teaching sessions the teacher quickly roved around the rest of the children, encouraging them to work quickly and not be too fussy with the pictures. She then worked with another small group of children that needed more support to decide on the three words they could include with their pictures.

The children talked to ERO about what they liked doing in writing. Most mentioned the variety of ways they got to talk about their ideas before they began writing.

“““

I like writing. I understand more than I used to.

I like talking first because we get ideas.

We do travel talking and sometimes we do memories. We also do a doughnut with two circles and talk and listen and then the outside of the circle moves and the other one talks while that one listens.

Students

Every child’s contribution to discussions were expected and valued.



Some of the published writing on display in a junior class

Using a structured process to teach non-fiction writing

ERO's report *Reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 (2009)* found effective teachers gave children a purpose for writing and encouraged them to write about things and experiences they were likely to be familiar with. Their teaching was evidence based, deliberate and gave children opportunities to practise new skills and knowledge during the instructional classroom programme.

Leaders and teachers at **EAST TAIERI SCHOOL** had worked on giving children a purpose for writing as part of the considerable emphasis they placed on improving writing during recent years. Some recent developments had included:

- > working with groups of target students as part of an Accelerating Literacy Learning (ALL) project
- > providing opportunities for the whole staff to learn about high quality writing features
- > establishing clear expectations about what children should achieve in writing at each year level
- > introducing assessment processes teachers, children and their parents could use to track a child's progress and identify their next learning steps.

The improvements contributed to success when writing for many children.

The most recent developments began when the leaders and teachers sought further strategies to improve writing for some boys who were not as motivated to write as others. During a professional development visit to another local school, they learnt about a non fiction writing model that had been successful with struggling readers and writers. Leaders decided to work with the literacy facilitator to explore new non fiction writing strategies to use with their children.

The non fiction writing programme combined reading and writing to provide specific literacy instruction in content areas. It was originally developed for secondary students by identifying the characteristics of good readers and writers compared to less able readers and writers, as below:

- Successful readers and writers know:
- > reading and writing changes according to text and task
 - > text structure changes according to content area, knowledge construction and author's intent
 - > how to identify language features and use these to deepen their understanding
 - > reading and writing require regular reflection on the process according to task and experience
 - > how to research using multiple texts, categories, synthesis and new understandings.

The process teachers applied and modified used the following nine stages for children in Years 5 and 6. Children in Years 1 to 4 used some of the stages as they developed confidence with all aspects of the process.

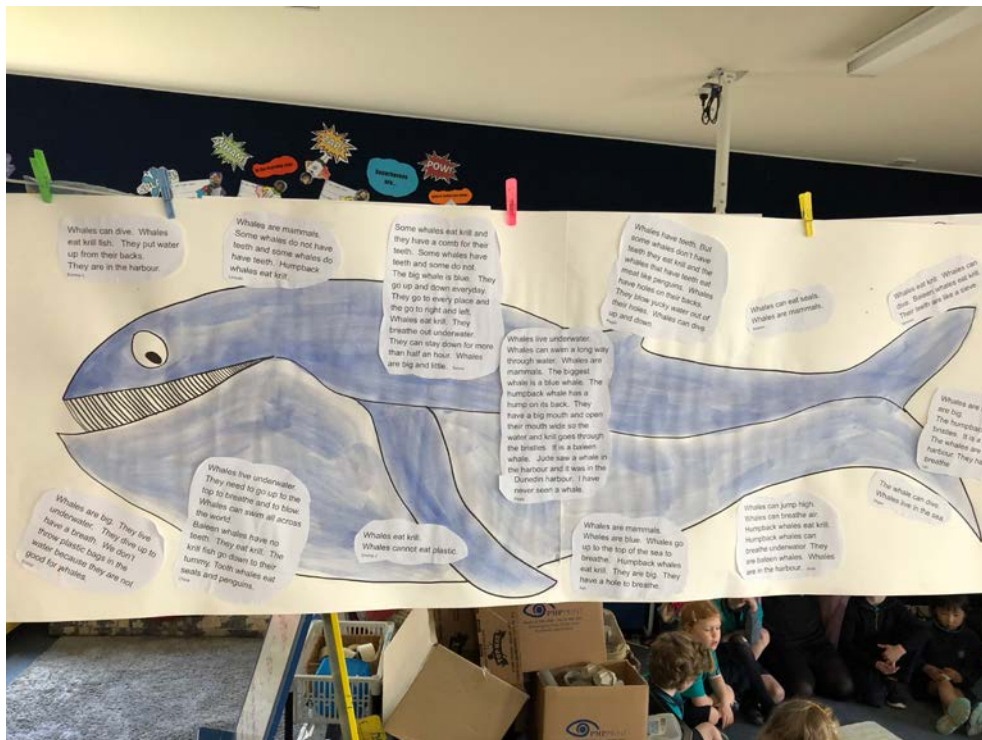
1. Identify the text form.
2. Look at the text features to gather as much information as possible about the content of the text.
3. Discuss prior knowledge of the text type and topic.
4. Read the text, focusing on specific language elements such as the topic and main idea, the topic sentence, captions and other features.
5. Break down the task and write key questions.
6. Set up a graphic organiser to begin note taking.
7. Read the text and make notes.
8. Write paragraphs/report.
9. Reflect.

ERO observed writing instruction at three different year levels and saw how children were motivated to write through a focus on non-fiction.

Year 1 writers

Children in Year 1 had a balance of informal writing opportunities and more formal writing instruction where they discovered and wrote about different content areas. During play-based learning, children often independently chose to write lists, menus, books and records of games they played. Their teacher told ERO the

non fiction writing process had helped children to write a lot more and use more complex sentences because their ideas had been fully discussed before they wrote. The teacher pointed out a display of high-quality writing about whales completed in Term 2 by children younger than five and a half years old.



ERO observed formal writing instruction during which children were learning and writing about things in space. Children were able to suggest the topic that interested them. Earlier in the term they had written about pirates and now their interests had shifted to a focus on space. The day before, children had read and written about the moon.

All the children were enthusiastically involved in the pre writing activity. They started by sharing their prior knowledge of the sun. Their teacher wrote down in a big book some of the key words they could use. Soon children started to ask questions about the sun and the teacher also wrote these down. Their questions included:

- > How big is it?
- > How bright is it?
- > How heavy is it?
- > If you touched it, would you die?
- > How hot is it?

The teacher then read a small booklet about the sun and the children discussed whether the text was imaginary or true. The children recalled the words they had noticed in the booklet and the teacher wrote the key words – star, earth, light. Children also identified the interesting words, ‘huge’ and ‘enormous’, and used their arms to show what they meant. The teacher read another small booklet and repeated the activity to include more key words about the sun. Finally, the children watched a very brief video clip to further extend their prior knowledge and revisit the list of key words.

Before the children went away to write, the teacher checked to see how much the children knew about the sun that they could use in their writing. The children sat in a circle and looked at the key words again. The teacher asked “why have I written these words – hot, bright, eight minutes, star?” They were then asked to think of a sentence that included some of the interesting words and tell their neighbour their sentence.

Each child was given their writing book and went away to write. Some chose to stay near the big book where the teacher had written the key words. The teacher reminded a few children of their personal writing goals to think about when writing.

Every child excitedly began writing. They were all able to tell ERO the writing goals they were working on. Some were practising identifying the words they weren’t sure of by underlining them, and said they could go back to the teacher’s book to check them later. They confidently wrote about the sun.



Writing in Years 3 and 4

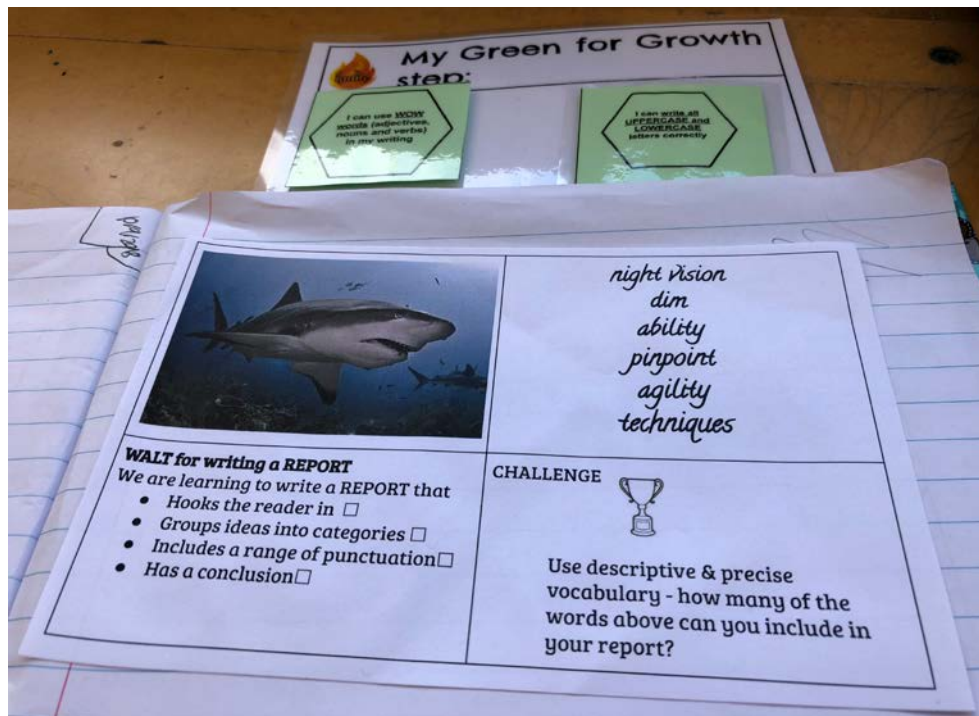
Children in Years 3 and 4 also did a variety of writing activities. One of the most popular activities was *Quick Writes*. They selected a picture provided by the teacher and wrote about an aspect of the picture. They all had writing pathways sheets that outlined the skills they should master by the end of the year. Children coloured the skill they had mastered in yellow and identified their next learning step. Each Friday, children met with their teacher to show which of the new skills they had mastered. They showed the piece of work that illustrated the skill. Each time they demonstrated the skill, they coloured one side of the relevant hexagon. Once the skill was demonstrated six times, the hexagon was completely coloured in.

By the end of Year 3 writing pathway

Name:	Year:	
I can do this at the start	This is my next step	I can do this now with evidence
Good as gold (yellow)	Green for growth (green)	Purple with proof (purple)

The diagram consists of 24 hexagons arranged in a circular pattern. Each hexagon contains a specific writing skill. The skills are as follows:

- I can plan before I write using strategies: » lists and mind maps » gathering main ideas
- I use words related to the topic » adjectives, nouns and verbs
- I can check my writing for spelling, grammar & punctuation
- I can sequence my ideas clearly
- I can use my memory to spell personal words and high frequency words (list 1-4, some 5-6)
- I can write sentences that have correct tenses
- My ideas link with the topic
- I can spell unknown words using my knowledge » of spelling rules » letter sounds
- I can write all uppercase and lowercase letters correctly so that they can be easily read
- I can label diagrams to support meaning
- I can publish my work in a variety of ways depending on purpose and audience
- I can write simple and compound sentences
- I can revise and edit my writing to check it makes sense and impacts on the reader
- I can vary my sentence beginnings and lengths
- I can use basic punctuation correctly (A . ? !)
- I can spell unknown words using spelling patterns
- I can find words I need to spell using classroom resources
- I can structure my writing to fit the purpose
- I use descriptive language to help build a picture
- I try to write some complex sentences
- I can give others feedback on their writing
- I can use my memory to spell personal words and high frequency words (list 1-4, some 5-6)
- I can sequence my ideas clearly
- I can check my writing for spelling, grammar & punctuation
- I use words related to the topic » adjectives, nouns and verbs
- I can plan before I write using strategies: » lists and mind maps » gathering main ideas

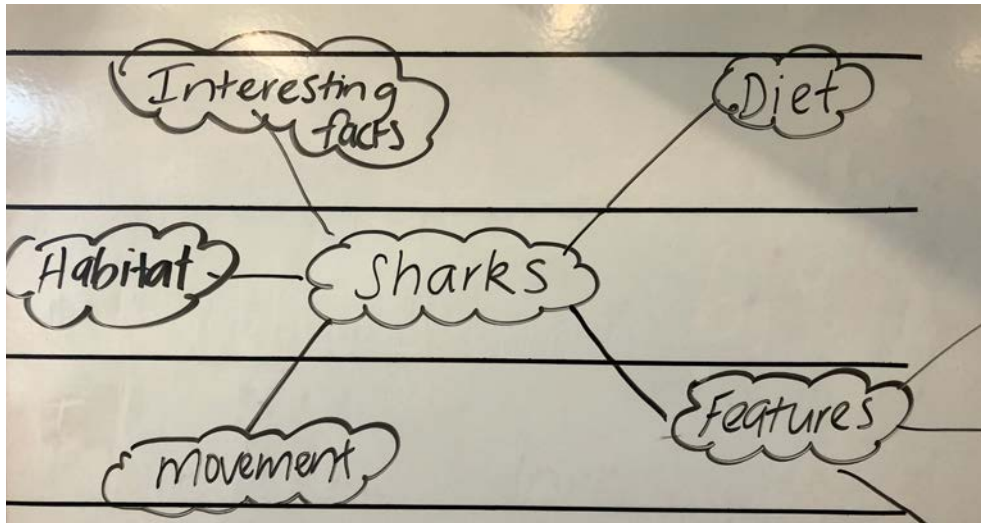


Children in Years 3 and 4 used more parts of the non fiction writing process than Year 1 children. When ERO visited the class they were involved in the second day of their focus on sharks. The day before the children had looked at, and discussed, the task and the features they were to include in their writing as learning intentions:

- > hook the reader in
- > group ideas into categories
- > include a range of punctuation
- > have a conclusion.

Children were also reminded of their individual writing goals taken directly from the writing pathway as shown here as *my green for growth step*. Finally, children discussed interesting words they might include in their writing. They had identified the things about sharks they wanted to know more about. These queries were then displayed on the whiteboard as the beginning of a mindmap. The teacher worked with the children to agree on five topics in the mind maps to focus their thinking, when planning their writing, shown on the next page.

The teacher had shown a video clip about sharks and the children added more key words to their own mindmaps. The video was regularly paused to allow discussion and the recording of key words in their mindmaps.



Ideas to investigate generated by the children (top) and a completed mindmap (bottom) to use to develop each paragraph.

ERO observed children using their mindmaps to write an introduction. They had to introduce three facts they were interested in and try to use the interesting words. Children were highly focused and many were crossing the interesting words off the list when they had used them. The teachers worked with a small group of children that had a similar writing goal, while the other children wrote independently. All children were highly motivated and on task.

Before the end of the lesson, the children were brought together and invited to share their introduction with their peers. Their enthusiasm for the task was evident, as most the children had their hand up asking to share their work. Children shared their initial sentences that clearly highlighted how they had hooked their readers. The sharing part of the lesson identified that the non fiction writing had particular benefits for boys. ERO saw they were just as keen to share their high quality examples as the girls, and were enthusiastic rather than reluctant writers.

Although the complexity of the writing the children shared varied considerably, some were able to go well beyond the learning intentions for the task, and included imagery and other features they had learnt in creative writing as shown in this child-edited example.

“”

There is a beastly unique vicious organism that glides gracefull like a superhero through the dim water, scoffing on its defenceless prey. You guessed it, the creature with big beady eyes and a toothy jaw, hiding in the watery shadows... It's a shark!!

Sharks have special techniquies and dazzling feature that they use sometimes when they ambish their terrified prey. Sharks have the ability to pinpoint or target where the delicious smell that is wafting through the water is coming from!! The Pygmy Sharks rough and jagged body can glow in the murky water.

The dark is not a problem for sharks because they have night vision. It's unlikley that other fish have night vision so sharks are fascinating and lucky.

Year 4 child

At the end of the lesson, the teachers shared what they would focus on the next day. The children were going to:

- > concentrate on using conjunctions
- > undertake some self checks of the work they had already completed
- > work with a peer to help them upgrade at least one word or sentence.

Years 5 and 6 writers

Children in Years 5 and 6 participated in many of the same writing activities and self assessments as those in Years 3 and 4. However, they were able to confidently engage with all parts of the non fiction writing process in groups and independently. Recently, children had used the process to investigate their chosen topics and write speeches to practise persuasive writing. Children had presented speeches about topics such as banning zoos, dangerous dogs and poultry farms; saving endangered species; and the damage plastic caused. Their teacher had selected the topic they were to read and write about, because of the high numbers of children who were interested in the impacts of plastic. They used an article from DOGOnews about Rotterdam's Picturesque floating park.

The lesson ERO observed occurred on the second day the children had engaged with the content. The day before, they had each contributed to a glossary of complex terms and key words identifying the Rotterdam article in bold. Each child had read the article, researched one of the words and then written a simple definition that was then distributed to each child. The children were well supported so they could fully understand what they were expected to write about. The teacher shared a blank graphic organiser that outlined the task. The children identified and highlighted key words (as shown below), and then suggested, refined and agreed the wording for two focus questions that would help them complete the task. The questions were also recorded in the graphic organiser.

Rotterdam's picturesque floating market park is built entirely from recycled plastic waste

Using evidence from the text, discuss the advantages of using plastic waste to create a floating park.

Question	Notes
What was the process taken when using plastic waste to create floating park?	> First plastic waste is captured
What are the advantages?	> 100,000 marine animals choked/suffocated every year being saved > Dutch environmentalists devised a way to capture plastic waste before it reaches the open sea

The process children used next helped them fully engage with the text and order their own ideas into paragraphs. The teacher asked the children to read the first paragraph of the article and share facts that might answer the questions in their own words. They highlighted key words, rather than whole sentences, to make

sure they thought deeply about the text. When they shared a fact they were asked to decide which of the two questions the fact would answer. The first three facts were recorded on the graphic organiser and then the children filled in more of their own facts independently as they read more paragraphs. The teacher reminded them to use their own filters to make sure their key facts actually answered the questions and ignored aspects not related to the specific questions. The children explained that this not only helped them stick to the relevant facts, but also helped them order their paragraphs. The notes in each cell usually formed one paragraph and the question usually helped them write a topic sentence. They also pointed out that this, and learning about topic sentences, had helped them organise their ideas and paragraphs in their creative writing.

The next day's lesson was to involve children in:

- > creating a topic sentence
- > discussing the order of their notes for a paragraph
- > modelling, discussing and recording notes into full sentences
- > discussing linking of sentences to the sentence before
- > writing paragraphs.

Benefits of the process

Leaders identified considerably increased enthusiasm for writing particularly from the boys, and concluded that having the structure helped them decide what to write.

“”

They have the security of knowing where they are heading and what they can do to get there.

Leader

The children wrote about contexts interesting to them. Teachers acknowledged that while the topics were often highly interesting to the boys, they were just as appealing to the girls. Engaging in the texts, videos and discussions helped children practise applying different writing skills through contexts they knew a lot about. They were not blocked by trying to work out what to write about. Instead they could practise using conjunctions, interesting sentence starters, and many other learning intentions by writing about contexts they understood. Teachers also acknowledged the children were developing high-quality research and writing skills they would confidently use in their future education and learning.

04

Making sure all teachers have the knowledge to enable literacy success for every child

ERO's report *Accelerating the progress of priority learners in primary schools (2013)* identified the need for ongoing professional learning and development (PLD) to build teachers' confidence to understand and use strategies to accelerate learning for children needing additional support. Teachers at **HOKOWHITU SCHOOL** demonstrated a well considered commitment to accelerating learning for these children by implementing new practices, particularly in classrooms. Leaders and teachers were reflective practitioners who were constantly looking for better ways to improve achievement. They understood that when a child was not progressing well, their teaching approaches needed to change. Their most recent changes focused on two progress issues they sought to solve: supporting writers in Years 4 to 6, and reducing the need for withdrawing Years 1 and 2 children from their classrooms for literacy interventions.

Many Hokowhitu School children in Years 4 to 6 achieved well in writing. Teachers had focused on writing over the past few years and saw considerable gains for many children. However, supporting those students who were not achieving well in writing was identified as an ongoing issue.

The main changes made to teaching strategies allowed teachers to move away from literacy interventions for groups of children to making sure all teachers had the knowledge to implement teaching practices to ensure success for every child.

This narrative shares the changes for teaching literacy to junior students, and then discusses the benefits for children who are English for speakers of other languages (ESOL). Finally, information about the writing programmes in Years 4 and 5 is shared.

Reducing the need for withdrawal from class for literacy interventions

In recent years, teachers had focused on improving reading instruction in the first year. The need for improvement was identified in 2014, when less than 60 percent of children had reached the expected reading level when they turned six. By the time children turned seven, about 80 percent reached the expected reading level, but some were not able to sustain their improvements.

In 2015, teacher PLD, parent education sessions, better monitoring of achievement levels, and clear progressions of teaching and learning were introduced. Although these contributed to some improvements, leaders were still not satisfied with the outcomes for those children needing additional support with early reading and writing.

A further significant concern was that only half the children who had participated in Reading Recovery were meeting literacy expectations at the end of Year 6. Leaders also noted a discrepancy between the reading level the children were achieving in the Reading Recovery programme and their instructional reading level in class. These children had difficulty connecting the letter sound to the symbol, and hearing and writing sounds in words. Leaders felt the children were not transferring learning from the intervention into their learning in the classroom. Teachers also determined that many children who had difficulty with early writing success also had difficulty forming many of the letters. Leaders wanted to see more children succeed in the teaching pods (kete) with fewer requiring withdrawal from their class for intervention programmes.

Leaders engaged a literacy expert to work with teachers from across the whole school to completely revise their literacy teaching practices. The new intervention, called Multi-Sensory Structure Language (MSL) aimed to reinforce the connections between the symbols children see, the sounds they hear, and the actions they feel.

During the PLD provided by the literacy expert, teachers learned about the structure of language and the alphabetic code. Some teachers told ERO they learnt a lot but found the new learning challenging. As they had been good spellers and writers themselves, they had not learnt explicit teaching strategies to support children needing extra help to achieve success with early literacy. The PLD provider taught the teachers the alphabetic code as if they were a class of children, explained the screening tools and modelled teaching strategies they could use themselves.

Teacher aides also attended a PLD session on the structured language instruction. The session shared information about new terms and concepts, and outlined the progression some children needed to move through to achieve literacy success. Teachers explained some of the teaching points children would see during in-class teaching workshops, as well as ways teacher aides could support children with follow up activities after a teaching workshop.

Making deliberate connections between reading and writing in Years 1 and 2

Teachers applied new strategies to teaching new entrant children letter formation and sounds together in a systematic way. Each child participated in an individualised programme, planned after analysis of results from a phonological screening assessment.

Most children initially used whiteboards to write a selected group of letters while practising the related letter sounds. Their early reading reinforced those same letters and sounds. Later children moved to writing and reading a wider variety of letters, sounds and words. Children also learned lists of irregular words they called Heart Words.

Here is an example of the explicit teaching determined for Year 1 children.

Stage 1 Teaching – Code (Mostly Year 1 children)

Phonological awareness – identify words in sentences, discriminate and generate rhyme, blends and segment syllables.

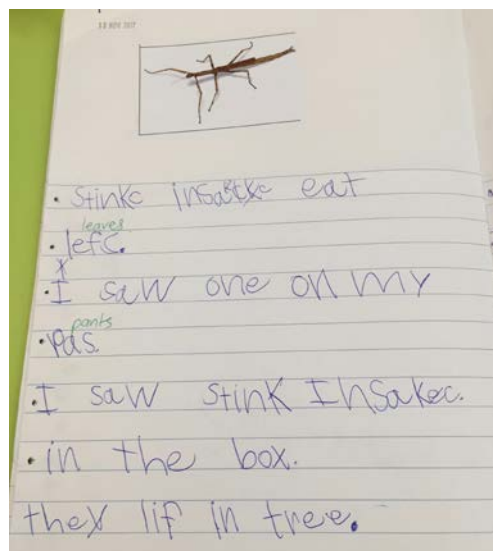
Phonemic awareness – identify first/last sounds in words, segment and blend sounds in consonant vowel (CV) words consonant vowel consonant (CVC) words.

The code:

- | | |
|--|---|
| > closed syllable CV and CVC | > know short and long vowel sounds |
| > letters formation – lowercase | > longer spelling for /k/ is – ck |
| > digraphs closed syllables (th, sh, ch, ng, ck) | > suffixes 's' (making a word plural) 'ing' |
| > open syllables | > list 1 Heart Words |
| > s had two sounds /s/ /z/ | |

Teachers modelled writing sentences that reinforced the sounds and words children had focused on. Teachers then dictated simple sentences for children to write themselves. Gradually the children moved on to writing more of their own sentences and ideas.

A sample of writing produced by a five-year old child is shown here. The writing started with dictated sentences and then included the child's own thoughts.



The class programme provided new entrant children with many other reading, writing and oral language opportunities. They enjoyed shared reading, using big books and poems. They used decodable texts and the Price Milburn (PM) readers during guided reading to introduce words in a sequential manner. Their reading and prewriting discussions also included many opportunities for discussions to support the children's developing oral language. Children engaged in many literacy activities during play-based learning including making shopping lists, reading books and acting out imaginary scenes, roles and activities.

Ongoing monitoring of individual children's achievement allowed them to progress at differing rates. Some children quickly learned the alphabet code, and were successfully reading as high as level 18 or Turquoise of the Ready to Read levelled texts by the time they turned six. They were also becoming confident writers.

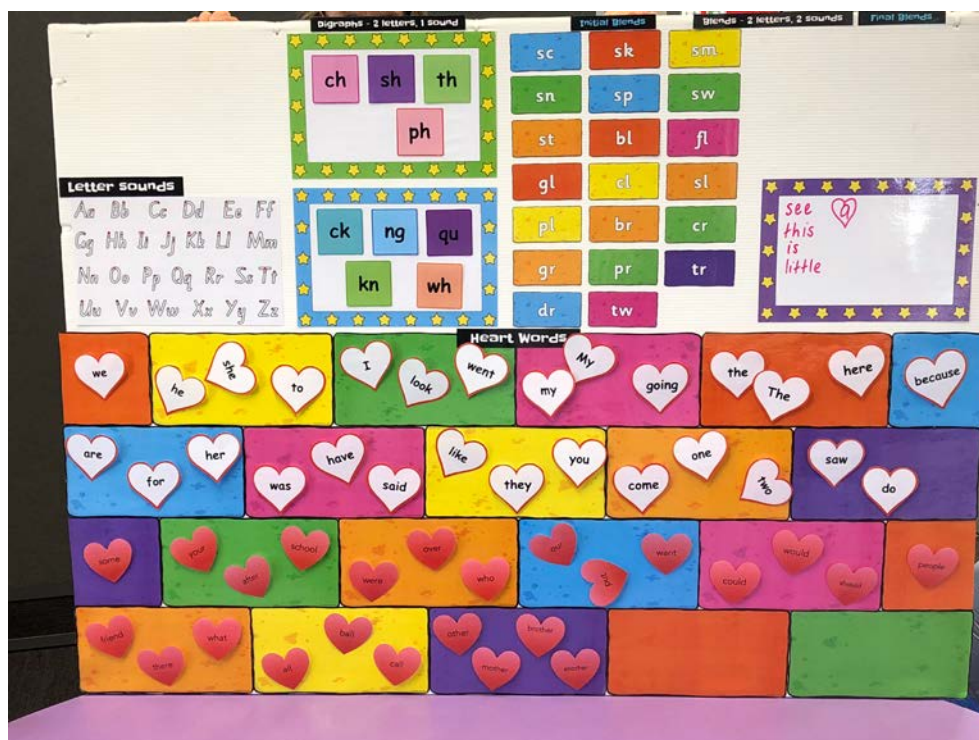
► ERO spoke with a boy who had attended school for six months. He showed his written work and read aloud three of his most recent pieces of writing. He was able to identify which sentences were dictated by the teacher and which he had thought of himself. He explained more about some of the events he had written about such as a visit to the Life Education bus. He said he was a good reader and writer because he knew about syllables and vowels. He was keen to explain that 'y' was sometimes a vowel and often when a word ended with an 'e' it had a long vowel sound. He said he liked writing and 'did hundreds of drawings and writing at home'.

Working with parents

Parents attended an information evening to learn more about their children's structured language and play-based learning. Leaders and teachers were highly aware parent education was vital to explain how they could support this learning and why children were bringing home different resources. The change from bringing home an early reader on the first day to bringing home letter/sound and heart-word cards required careful management. Parents received quite detailed information about what the teachers and children were doing at school and what they could do to reinforce at home, including advice about encouraging play at home. Extracts from this guidance are on the following page.

Play	MSL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Tell stories to your child and ask them questions about what they remember > Give children time and space to act out imaginary scenes, roles and activities > Allow children to move between make-believe games and reality (playing house/ helping with chores) > Schedule time for your child to play with friends to build friendships and practise socialising > Buy your child 'true toys' such as blocks, lego, and costumes to encourage creativity > Spend unscheduled, unstructured time together with you child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Read to your child and with your child > Support your child learning the alphabetic code by practising their letter sounds, heart words > Use the letter sounds they know to create words (if they know m, s, t, i, a they can make mat, sit, sat) > Support your child to learn the five vowels – initially the short vowel sound mat, pet, sit, not, mug > When reading, only sound out regular words (am, dog, hat, chop) not heart words (come, said, to, was) > Help your child to practise segmenting words (stop s-t-o-p) > Look for rhyming words and ask your child to think of more words that rhyme.

Some parents also kept in contact with their child's teachers to further discuss what the child was doing at home and at school. One teacher helped a parent revise some of the concepts by discussing a chart displayed on the wall in her child's classroom. The parent took a photograph of the display and later reported that using the chart at home helped both her and her child make sense of the things the teachers were focused on at school (shown above).



Success for children whose English is their second or other language (ESOL)

The new teaching practices also benefited children in ESOL programmes. Formal opportunities to practise letter formation and the alphabetic code in a systematic way helped them progress in both reading and writing. Children quickly became familiar with regular patterns and could confidently read and write high frequency words (Heart Words). Practising dictated sentences helped them understand print conventions, which allowed them to record their own ideas when working with their peers. Learning the same reading and writing strategies when working in their ESOL programme and their classroom, helped them develop confidence with writing in a new language.

The writing approaches that already worked for most children in Years 4 to 6

Teachers had previously introduced a variety of strategies and approaches that had helped many of the children to achieve well in writing. A school goal for 2015 was to accelerate the writing progress of boys who were below curriculum expectations. Each teacher set specific goals for the children in their class. The goals varied, as did the teacher's actions and strategies, depending on the needs and strengths each teacher identified in their students. They moderated judgements of writing samples, and then agreed which students had progressed. In this way, they were easily able to identify their target students.

During the year, teachers reviewed and recorded the impact of their deliberate acts of teaching on the students' achievement. Some teachers interviewed children to gain their perspectives on what was helping them to succeed in writing. They also identified challenges that reduced progress for some children.



One teacher's end-of-year reflection

I have implemented:

- > daily free-writing time
- > free-writing prompts on the wall
- > free-writing ideas and questions
- > modelling of writing 'think alouds'
- > Google Docs set up
- > writing goals developed alongside the children and glued in books
- > celebrations of writing on blog, walls, and in newsletter
- > writing for authentic purposes
- > interest-based writing groups.

At the end of the year, teachers documented changes in their practice, successes enjoyed and challenges encountered. They proposed further steps for the next year. These reviews were collated for each team and summarised for the whole staff. Updates of the school's teaching and learning handbook, *Key Foundations for Pedagogy*, incorporated findings from these reviews to outline the teaching of writing expectations for teachers. The school-developed learning progressions and explicit feedback made learning and strategies for learning visible for children and teachers. Authentic writing tasks were situated in a familiar context (for example, the family), or related to learning in the wider curriculum (for example, in art or science).

► **The writing instructional approaches teachers identified included:**

- > modelling
- > teacher think alouds
- > use of examples (literature and within the class and school)
- > writing groups based on needs
- > oral language opportunities
- > shared writing
- > deliberate acts of teaching used wisely
- > making explicit links between reading and writing
- > different ways to provide feedback for children.

Teachers used the writing progressions as a tool to sharpen the focus of their teaching. They also intentionally shared them with the children using goal sheets. Children knew what they were trying to master and could self-manage their learning in workshops and conferencing activities. They would evaluate their own progress and the teacher would indicate with an arrow when they were close to moving up a level or sub-level. Many children made good progress and were working at the expected level.

The new approach to support children not achieving well in writing

The information gained through interviews with children in Years 4 to 6, and an analysis of writing samples, identified a significant group of children with difficulties in meeting some writing expectations. These children were generally able to explain and organise their ideas quite well and were developing some useful knowledge of structural and language features. However, difficulties with spelling limited their use of vocabulary and motivation to write. When assessing these children's writing it was evident that they continued to achieve

at Level 1 of *The New Zealand Curriculum* in aspects such as spelling and vocabulary. However, most of these children achieved at a higher level when taking account of their ideas.

Leaders and teachers collaborated in a whole-school inquiry into the teaching of spelling by identifying the need to focus more on phonemic awareness. They recognised that although some children had no difficulty learning about the sounds in words, all readers and writers need to have an awareness of the sound system of the English language. The children who were not progressing to Level 2 of the curriculum had little knowledge of the correspondence between spoken sounds and the alphabet code.

Teachers in Years 4 and 5 realised the practices introduced in the whole-school PLD about structured language were likely to benefit children in their kete (teaching pod). They decided to teach spelling through a word-study programme that helped children explore and better understand the alphabetic code as a means to improve decoding, spelling and writing.

Initially, they used an assessment screening tool provided by the literacy PLD expert. The tool focused on:

- > segmenting sentences into words
- > discriminating rhyme
- > producing rhyme
- > blending syllables
- > segmenting syllables
- > identifying first sounds
- > identifying last sounds
- > blending sounds
- > segmenting sounds
- > memory for sentences.

Teachers made many changes as they developed their own and children's confidence with the new learning. First, teachers focused on explicit teaching of sounds or the parts of the code that most children needed to master. They also emphasised the links between word study and writing. By the middle of the year, 25 children were identified as needing more intensive support and were organised into five groups for further in-class support.

Originally, three teachers in the open learning space decided one of them would teach each group reading, the second would teach writing, and the third teacher would focus on word study. However, teachers' further reflection following



additional PLD convinced them to teach word study, reading and writing together to help children fully understand and apply the connections between speaking, word study, reading and writing. When ERO visited the school the three teachers were implementing this change so these children could participate in daily 20 minute workshops focused on the three aspects. They were also considering how to better group these children to focus more on reading and writing interests and needs, rather than group children according to their reading age.

► ERO spoke with a Year 5 child who had made considerable progress in writing in the previous two terms. She showed a sample of her work from the beginning of the year that had a lot of simple ideas but many words spelled incorrectly. The child couldn't easily read what was written in her earlier work. This issue made editing and reworking her writing difficult.

The most recent piece of work had few errors and the ideas formed a more logical sequence of more complex ideas. The child was able to recognise errors and fix them. She explained she was now proud of her work rather than feeling it wasn't very good.

The child thought the word study activities and the workshops focused on writing strategies had helped her improve.

Teachers in Years 4 and 5 did not have to completely abandon the writing teaching and assessment tools they were familiar with. To monitor progress they used the same asTTle assessments and other tools, such as a pseudo-word test, they already used along with information from observations and discussions with individuals.

When ERO was at the school, teachers in the Years 4 and 5 kete (teaching pod) were still modifying their programme to accommodate their previous teaching of writing practices with the new word-study teaching and the more deliberate links to the teaching of reading. They were still collaboratively reviewing the progress of the 25 students receiving intensive support through daily workshops, while continuing to use the writing practices that had previously resulted in the success of so many other students.

Next steps

Leaders were revising their literacy teaching expectations to logically combine the explicit teaching of the alphabetic code, with both reading and writing content. Early work on this showed less emphasis was needed on the code by Years 5 and 6, and more complex writing features were expected at this level. An example from their early draft of expectations for part of stage five writing is shown below.

Stage 5 Explicit Teaching – Writing Content

Curriculum Level 3 (Many Year 5 children would focus on these)

- > I sometimes use similes, metaphors and language features to enhance my writing.
 - > My choice of language interests my reader, has personal detail and is sincere.
 - > I use impact to gain and maintain the readers' interest.
 - > I develop my ideas by using appropriate detail.
 - > I am beginning to use paragraphs.
 - > I use interesting and varied sentences, and topic words to create flow and pace.
 - > I can use grammar/tense that is correct most of the time.
 - > I use direct speech, adverbs, synonyms, and adjectives to enhance my writing.
 - > I include descriptive words, emotive language and visual language features.
 - > I can use all basic punctuation, including apostrophes, correctly.
 - > I check and edit my writing (using dictionary, adding detail).
-

Focusing everyone on agreed writing goals

ERO's report *Raising student achievement through targeted actions (2015)* concluded: "Successful schools set effective goals and also took effective actions to accelerate learning. Their targeting demonstrated two key qualities. Goals and targets set an optimum level of challenge for teachers and students, by being low enough to seem achievable but high enough to make a real difference. Goals and targets also created maximum visibility and alignment between the targets and objectives set, and the plans and initiatives of trustees, school leaders, teachers, students, parents and whānau. This ensured that daily actions were taken in classrooms and across the school community that supported successful learning outcomes."

The number of children reaching the appropriate level in writing was improving every year at **ORATIA SCHOOL**. A key strategy to enable the ongoing improvements was to make sure everyone in the school understood what progress teachers and children needed to make, and how to make the desired improvements. Writing assessment data was rigorously analysed and deliberately shared with everyone.

School-wide writing assessment data was collected and analysed twice each year along with other reading and mathematics data. Teachers carefully assessed children's writing samples and moderated their assessment judgements in their teaching syndicates. Teachers from one syndicate also had teachers from other syndicates assess some writing samples to promote greater consistency when making subjective writing judgements about children's achievement. Working cooperatively in shared-teaching spaces allowed for greater flexibility when grouping students to match their individual writing goals, determined from analysis of writing samples. Having more than one teacher's perspective when analysing a child's writing also helped teachers increase their understanding of what was limiting some children's progress and how to respond to their strengths, needs and interests.

Trustees' response to achievement challenges

Every six months leaders provided trustees with comprehensive reports about progress and achievement in writing, reading and mathematics. Teachers fully understood the information leaders shared with trustees, as they had discussed and contributed to the reports before they were presented to the board. To gain a wider understanding of each other's perspectives, trustees invited teachers to attend the board meeting when the report was fully discussed.

The achievement reports to the board included the following detailed information:

- > writing achievement and progress at each year level
- > analysis and explanations of achievement disparities for boys, girls and different cultural groups of children
- > the identification of successes and concerns about writing achievement and progress
- > descriptions of actions already in place to promote improvement
- > suggested recommendations for actions to respond to achievement and progress challenges.

Recent actions the board had put in place to respond to the writing issues included:

- > professional learning and development (PLD) for teachers to improve younger children's phonemic awareness, so they were more confident to attempt to spell a wider range of words
- > school-wide PLD with an external literacy expert to increase teachers' and children's understanding of the skills needed for success in writing
- > PLD for teachers new to the school to understand the writing approaches teachers used across the school
- > monitoring and support for teachers to make sure agreed strategies were implemented in all classes.

Working with parents

One teacher had trialled an approach that increased the involvement of parents of a group of boys whose progress in writing she wanted to accelerate. The teacher hosted an information evening for the parents and whānau of the group to explain what she intended to do, and what this would mean for her, the adults and the boys concerned.

Before the parent evening, she shared part of her presentation with the boys to help them commit to being involved and understand her intentions. During the meeting, the teacher shared the strategies she was using and showed parents how they could reinforce them at home. Parents were also asked to encourage the boys to write about things they were interested in or doing at home. Examples of some of the information shared with parents are shown below.

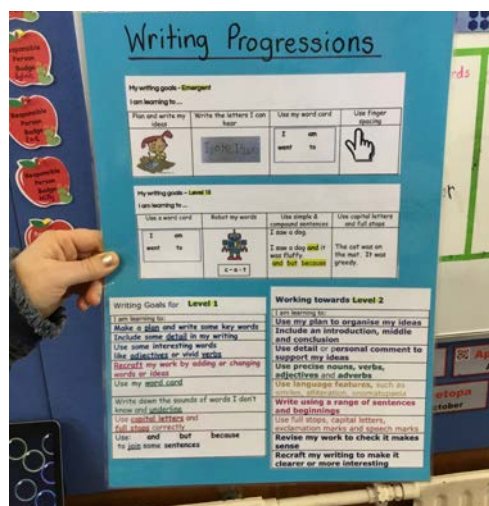
How can you help?	What I am doing in class to support...
Be an audience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Positive feedback – respond to writing by ignoring the stuff you want to fix – sit on your hands > Talk about their goal Planning generating ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Email home every Friday about the genre I am teaching, i.e. recounts – talk about what they could write about that week, bring in photos, objects, home videos etc > Talk, talk, talk, talk 	Skills/knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Phonics programme > Handwriting focus group > Workshops and mini lessons An awareness of thinking and strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Conferencing > Setting goals – checklist > Thinking out loud – my own > Saying their thinking out loud > Read Write app – reflecting/revising

The teacher had ongoing meetings with parents to discuss their child's interests and learning at school and at home, and to set new goals. Feedback from whānau and families confirmed they felt empowered and knew how to support their child at home with their writing.

Leaders and teachers across the school extended the focus on working with parents of target children after seeing how well the children in the trial were accelerating their progress.

Children's understanding of goals and targets

Children received information about their personal learning goals and school-wide goals. Teachers prioritised time in every class to conference with children to help them set personal writing goals, plan their actions and celebrate when they had achieved them. Children regularly participated in writing workshops matched to their learning needs and goals. In some classes children had opportunities to run student-led writing workshops. These children supported their peers and built their confidence and self-efficacy.



Leaders shared school-wide achievement targets with children during assemblies that parents could also attend. Leaders discussed teachers' actions to help reach the writing goal and what children could do. The following page shows the six-monthly information and achievement challenge shared with children during an assembly in the middle of 2016.

Progress from 2015 to 2016: percentage of children reaching the expected writing level.

2015		2016	
Y1	70%	Y2	80%
Y2	56%	Y3	62%
Y3	74%	Y4	76%
Y4	61%	Y5	62%
Y5	59%	Y6	72%

Our challenge in Term 3 and 4 is to move from 70 percent to 80 percent reaching the expected level. How do we achieve this together?

- > Take responsibility for your learning
- > Know your personal learning goals
- > Know what you have to do to achieve your goals
- > Work in a focused way to achieve your goals and then extend yourself by setting more difficult goals to achieve
- > Ask your teachers when you need help to achieve your goals.

ERO evaluators talked with students in Years 5 and 6 about how they made improvements or used their goals in their writing.



Our goals are shared with our parents and we can work on them at home and at school. We got our goals from doing a writing test that showed what we could do and what we couldn't do. Once we have a goal we work with our teacher and sometimes our parents to decide how to achieve the goal. We also set a date to say when we will try to achieve the goal by. If you achieve the goal you make another one.

A boy showed the ERO evaluator his goal sheet recorded in his Chromebook.

I write comments about my goal and my parents and teacher write comments too. My parents tell the teacher what I am doing at home to work on the goal and the teacher says what I am doing at school.

My teacher helps me most at the start of a writing workshop, She talks about what the focus of the lesson is. If we get stuck she doesn't give us the answers. She talks about the strategies we could use.

Students

Setting effective goals and actions together created a commitment for improvement that people across the school bought into and felt they owned personally.

Understanding writing progressions across the school

ERO's report *Reading and writing in Years 1 and 2 (2009)* highlighted the need for teachers and leaders to be clear about their important roles in setting achievement expectations, and monitoring how their teaching practices and processes help children to be successful young readers and writers.

Leaders and teachers at **FAIRFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL** were focused on making sure teachers understood and implemented successful writing practices. Before starting their writing development almost three years earlier, variability in the quality of teaching in writing was evident, and may have resulted in some children missing or repeating key learnings about writing. Leaders wanted teachers to fully understand and respond to the different stages children move through as they become confident writers. Leaders had also recognised progress often plateaued around Years 4 and 5 if children weren't confident enough with basic writing skills and structures. This prevented them from succeeding with more complex writing in the senior school.

Professional development

Leaders decided to focus on whole-school development of writing to improve the quality and consistency of writing programmes. Initially the professional learning and development (PLD) wasn't successful. The whole-school provision meant the approaches were too complex for some teachers, yet not challenging enough for others. Leaders then sought, and partially funded, a new PLD provider to facilitate improvements by focusing on both school-wide and individual teachers' strengths and needs.

The approach concentrated on developing senior leaders first. This approach was favoured as it was more likely to sustain progress once the external facilitator had left the school. The senior leaders worked with the facilitator to:

- > update their understanding of the teaching of writing
- > learn more about mentoring other teachers
- > introduce ways to monitor how well teachers were introducing new strategies.

Writing developments were then extended by leaders modelling and observing the teaching of writing in every classroom. Eventually, the in-class observations were replaced with teachers videoing some of their writing lessons before undertaking formal self reflection:

- > identifying their successes, challenges and progress by viewing the video
- > engaging in a post-video reflection conference with a senior leader
- > setting next step goals for themselves.

Writing progressions

A key activity to help teachers understand the writing stages children move through involved leaders and teachers working together to develop writing progressions across the curriculum levels, so teachers understood what each child had been taught previously and how they could extend more able writers. Leaders also wanted the progressions written in plain language so students and parents could use them. The progressions were written as 'I can' statements for children, explained both what the child was able to do, and the sources of evidence of achievement. They outlined what a child should be able to do after each year at school in relation to audience, purpose and voice; structure; and proof-reading and editing. Teachers used the progressions to set specific success criteria for children's self assessment. They also regularly referred to the success criteria during writing conferences with children.

Below is an example of the *Audience, Purpose and Voice* part of their writing progression for *After One Year at School*.

I can.....	The child is able to...	Sources of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > think about and share feelings and ideas that mean something to me > communicate a message in my writing > retell an event or story in the correct sequence > independently record my ideas and opinions > try to write the words I say in my story 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > explain what they are writing and why they are writing it > use personal voice – write as they speak conveying how they are feeling and their opinion > write with a clear sequence of events > write several sentences or record several ideas on paper > begin to articulate their learning intentions, show an awareness of success criteria and how well they have met this 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > teacher modelling book > anecdotal notes > published work > writing books > self assessment > writing samples > six year observational survey

Leaders believed doing this work together gave teachers more clarity about both deliberate teaching steps and assessments to help monitor progress.

Leaders also introduced exemplars and teacher reflection records, used to moderate judgements about children's writing. The exemplars showed a piece of writing at each curriculum sub level (i.e. each level basic, proficient and advanced). Teachers used the reflection records when formally assessing a sample of each child's writing. They made a judgement about the child's level of achievement using the progressions and recorded their answers to the following questions:

- > What evidence (in the writing) do you have that justifies your judgement about the level?
- > What are the strengths of this piece of writing?
- > What are the next learning steps for this child?
- > What is the learning conversation you should have with this child?

Other instructional writing strategies

As part of their PLD teachers used *Think Alouds* when modelling writing to the children to show what the teacher thought and did when starting and completing some writing. *'Oh I wonder what I could write about...I saw a big balloon the other day. I'll write, I saw an enormous balloon.'*

Teachers in the junior school introduced to all children some of the writing strategies used in Reading Recovery. They regularly tested children to see how many words they could write correctly. Children enjoyed seeing their progress and the teacher saw that many could correctly write well over 50 words by the time they were six years old.

Oral language testing had shown many of the children were well below their chronological age in oral language. Teachers in the junior school therefore placed considerable emphasis on building children's oral language. They read and discussed many stories and had children explain what some words in the story were describing. They were attuned to occasions when some children did not understand some words, and encouraged children to explain new vocabulary.

During shared reading, teachers introduced a range of books about the same topic to help children develop and use prior knowledge. Children discussed and then extended the ideas from one book when reading the next. They could also use the information they gained when writing about that or a similar topic.

Teachers used newspaper clippings, video clips, artefacts and pictures extensively as part of pre-writing discussions.

High quality pieces of writing were published, laminated and sent home to the child's whānau. On other occasions the child took the writing to their previous teacher or another teacher for positive and specific feedback.

Outcomes

Leaders saw many improvements. The biggest gains were evident in Years 4 and 5 where children were able to consolidate previous learning and develop their confidence in more complex writing. Seeing the recent progress they had made also motivated the children.

ERO spoke with a parent of a six-year-old boy who had progressed two writing levels in one year. The parent told us that one of his goals was 'to stretch out the words to hear all the sounds'. Her son knew how much he had progressed and had a strong desire to improve even more.



When we get home we do reading and try and follow through at home. He loves to write stories. He has really thrived with his writing this year.

Once he knew his sounds he was away. He loves being able to spell big words.

He is listening to what he is saying. He writes and writes. We need to reinforce things at home. You can't just leave it up to the teachers. He knows when he has gone up a level. He just wants to go up and up.

He says, "I want to be at a senior level before I am a senior."

Next steps

Although leaders had seen improvements for some individual children, and at particular year levels, they still sought further improvements. They had identified the following professional development areas to focus on to increase their gains:

- > oral language across the school to help children more confidently share their ideas and opinions before writing
- > cultural competencies to make sure teachers fully understand the home cultures and interests that would help engage children in writing
- > collaborative inquiries for teachers to research and trial further successful writing approaches and strategies.

Linking the narratives to the *School Evaluation Indicators*

The table below cross-references the eight narratives to the relevant indicators from ERO's *School Evaluation Indicators*. Leaders can use the table to facilitate discussion about the variety of effective practices found in the different narratives. Where leaders, teaching teams or teachers are currently focusing their attention on a particular domain, they can use the table to select narratives that feature effective practices in that domain.

Domain	School Evaluation Indicators	Narrative
Stewardship	The board scrutinises the effectiveness of the school in achieving valued student outcomes.	1,6
Leadership for excellence and equity	Leaders collaboratively develop and pursue the school's vision, goals and targets for equity and excellence.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	Leaders ensure effective planning, coordination and evaluation of the school's curriculum and teaching.	1
	Leaders promote and participate in professional learning and practice.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	Leaders build collective capacity in evaluation and inquiry for sustained improvement.	4,6
	Leaders build relational trust and effective collaboration at every level of the school.	1,2,4,6
Educationally powerful connections and relationships	School and community are engaged in reciprocal learning-centred relationships.	6
	Communication supports and strengthens reciprocal, learning-centred relationships.	4,6
	Student learning at home is actively promoted through the provision of relevant learning opportunities, resources and support.	4,7
	Community collaboration enriches opportunities for students to become confident, connected, actively involved, lifelong learners.	1

Responsive curriculum, effective teaching and opportunity to learn	Students have effective, sufficient and equitable opportunities to learn.	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
	Assessment for learning develops students' assessment and learning-to-learn capabilities.	1,2,3,5,6,7
Professional capability and collective capacity	Systematic, collaborative inquiry processes and challenging professional learning opportunities align with the school vision, values, goals and targets.	1,4,6
	Access to relevant expertise builds capability for ongoing improvement and innovation.	1,2,3,4
Evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building for improvement and innovation	Coherent organisational conditions promote evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building.	1,2,4,6,7
	Collective capacity to do and use evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building sustains improvement and innovation.	1,2,4

