

Teaching Practices, School Practices, and Principal Leadership: The first national picture 2017

Cathy Wylie, Sue McDowall, Hilary Ferral,
Rachel Felgate, and Heleen Visser



New Zealand now has its first national picture of teaching and school practices, and principal leadership in English-medium schools.

The Teaching and School Practices Survey Tool (TSP) is an online survey tool designed for schools and Kāhui Ako to inquire into their teaching, school, and principal leadership practices. The TSP tool was developed in 2017 and made available for use in Terms 2 and 3 of that year. The national picture presented in this report draws on the 2017 aggregated data. The tool was commissioned by the Ministry of Education to provide:

- school-level data that can be used by schools and Kāhui Ako in review and planning to improve teaching and leadership capability
- national data that can be used for evaluating the impact of policy, initially the introduction of Kāhui Ako and changes to professional learning and development.

The items in the TSP draw on robust research evidence about practices that are linked to desirable student experiences of learning and student outcomes. The items are consistent with *The New Zealand Curriculum*, ERO's school evaluation indicators, and the Standards for the Teaching Profession.

The online surveys are free for schools. Principals complete a survey about school practices and their own leadership. Teachers anonymously complete a survey about their own teaching practices, and their views of the school's practices and of the principal's leadership. (Teaching principals also complete the teaching practices survey.) Once surveys are completed, principals (or their nominated administrator) are able to access automated school-level reports and Kāhui Ako leaders are able to request an aggregated report for their group of schools.

The TSP supports the education system's increasing emphasis on professional inquiry and evaluative practices as key levers to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and higher and more equitable outcomes for students. Confidentiality of individual and school responses encourages honest self-report because the TSP is seen as a tool for inquiry for improvement, and not a judgement of individuals or schools.

Annual use of the tool will enable comparisons to be made over time—for schools, Kāhui Ako, and at the national level. Timing of the surveys is designed to fit school review and planning cycles.

Uptake of the TSP in its first year has been very good: overall, 403 schools used the TSP from late May to the end of October 2017. The aggregated data provide a nationally

representative picture from 4,355 teachers at 335 schools, and 353 principals.

This uptake indicates an appetite for robust information to guide inquiry. It is recommended that the data are considered alongside other information on student achievement, engagement, and wellbeing. The TSP has been well received by sector groups, government education agencies, and advisers working with school leaders and Kāhui Ako.

Outline of the tool

In developing the TSP, researchers drew on international literature, recent policy (Ministry, Education Review Office (ERO), and Education Council) and advice from the advisory group, to identify the areas that were considered most important for the future of New Zealand teaching and learning. A small number of key items were then developed for each of these areas (called domains).

Teaching Practices has five domains:

1. Optimising students' opportunities to learn
2. Diversity, equity, and inclusion
3. Learning-focused partnerships
4. Teaching as inquiry
5. Being professional.

School Practices has six domains:

1. School goals
2. Supportive and caring environment
3. Coherent curriculum and evaluation
4. Learning-focused partnerships
5. Strategic resource allocation
6. Developing professional practice (covering Professional feedback and support, Professional community and Teaching as inquiry).

Items across the School Practices domains have also been grouped to allow analysis of two more sets: Collaborative school practices and School practices for Māori learners.

The Principal Leadership section has 19 items. Two groups of items were identified through factor analysis: Interpersonal relations and working with others, and Direction and fresh horizons.

The national data for all the items are presented by domain in the report. The figures in the report are expected to be a useful resource for schools and Kāhui Ako when they are enquiring into their own data.

Key findings from the 2017 national picture

Most teachers see themselves carrying out 'well' or 'very well' many of the 29 teaching practices included in the TSP. Most teachers and principals see the 53 school practices included in the TSP as being 'moderately like our school' or 'very like our school'. Most teachers and principals also saw the 19 aspects of principal leadership in the TSP as being done 'well' or 'very well'.

The high level picture shows some differences at the domain level when it comes to the proportion of teachers saying they do something 'very well', or that the school practice is 'very like our school', as shown in Tables 1 and 2 below.

TABLE 1 Teaching Practices domains—average proportion of teachers reporting practices are done 'very well'

Domain	Mean
Being professional	43.4
Diversity, equity and inclusion	30.3
Optimising students' opportunities to learn	22.8
Teaching as Inquiry	22.3
Learning-focused partnerships	15.2

TABLE 2 School Practices domains and sets —average proportion of teachers reporting practices are 'very like our school'

Domain or set	Mean
Supportive and caring environment	48.7
Learning-focused partnerships	46.8
Professional community	42.6
School goals	41.4
Coherent curriculum and evaluation	36.6
Teaching as inquiry	35.2
Professional feedback and support	32.2
Collaborative practices	30.0
School practices for Māori learners	29.4
Strategic resource allocation	19.8

Principals' interpersonal relations and their working with others (rather than trying to do everything on their own) are highly rated, somewhat more so than their direction setting and encouraging fresh horizons. Principals tend to be more positive than teachers about their interpersonal relations, but less so on their direction setting and encouraging fresh horizons.

There is a wealth of information about the full range of teacher and principal reports of particular practices in this report that will be useful at policy, support, and practice levels.

Of note is that the decile and type of school a teacher works in made little difference to their ratings of their teaching practices. More experienced teachers and teaching principals reported higher levels of practice.

School practice ratings by teachers were also unrelated to school decile. However, there were slightly lower ratings from teachers in secondary schools, which are larger and more complex than other school types.

Main national strengths

In this section we look across all the items in each of the domains.

To identify the main aspects of national strength, we set the bar high. We list the teaching practices that stand out because around 40% or more of teachers report that they do them very well. Next we list the school practices that stand out because 50% of teachers say they are 'very like our school'. Then we list the principal practices that stand out because 50% of teachers say their principal does them very well. Each list starts with the item with the highest percentage of teachers.

Teaching practices reported as being done very well

Four of the 29 teaching practices included in the TSP were rated as being done very well by around 40% or more of teachers. These can be seen as particular strengths for New Zealand. They suggest a good sense of self-efficacy among teachers:

- take responsibility for the wellbeing of all the students you teach
- believe in your ability to improve learning outcomes for all students you teach
- make appropriate changes in response to challenge and feedback from colleagues
- promote understanding of others' perspectives and points of view.

School practices reported as being 'very like our school'

Twelve of the 53 school practices can be seen as particular strengths in New Zealand schools. The following practices were rated as being 'very like our school' by 50% or more of teachers. They indicate school cultures that emphasise relationships and support for students and their learning, that include parents and whānau, shared school values, and goals with high expectations:

- we welcome questions from parents and whānau about their child's learning in the school
- we have a positive environment in which student learning is the central focus
- we effectively include students in our classes, whatever their needs, strengths, and identities
- the school values are clearly evident in how staff interact with students
- we work in a safe and supportive environment
- school goals set high expectations for students
- things that don't work well are seen as opportunities for learning
- even in a difficult environment staff in this school can depend on each other
- we provide parents and whānau with opportunities to learn how to effectively support their child's learning at the school
- we seek and are responsive to parents' and whānau views about their child's learning
- we have an effective school plan to support student wellbeing and belonging
- we look into a range of evidence when we're trying to understand why students are struggling with their learning.

Principal leadership practices reported being done very well

Five of the 19 principal leadership practices can be seen as particular national strengths. The following were rated by 50% or more of teachers as being done very well by principals. They are consistent with the kind of culture that is evident in the school practices strengths described above:

- show commitment to continual improvement
- care for students
- model the school values
- maintain integrity in difficult situations
- look for solutions, not blame.

Main national challenges

To identify the main challenges, we list the practices that stand out because fewer than 25% of teachers identify them as ones that they do very well, or that are very like their school. None of the principal leadership items had fewer

than 25% of teachers saying that their principal did them very well. The two lists start with the lowest rating item.

Teaching practices reported by few teachers as being done very well

The teaching practices that are most challenging nationally for teachers to incorporate into their work and feel confident that they are doing very well are related to the changing role of the teacher. *The New Zealand Curriculum*, published in 2007 that took effect from 2010, has emphasised teaching in ways that build learner agency, develop capabilities needed for a fast changing world, and that frame teaching as itself having a core dimension of inquiry and evaluation. These aspects are likely to need more systematic support to foster teacher confidence and capability so that they can do them very well. The following practices were rated by 25% or fewer teachers as being done very well:

- collaborate with the local community so that their expertise can be used to support learning in class or other school activities
- support the local community by ensuring that students have opportunities to actively contribute to it in ways valued by the community
- ensure students interact with information to critique and create knowledge, and transform it
- ensure students direct their own learning pace, content, and goals
- ensure students think critically and talk about what and how they are learning
- collaborate with parents and whānau so that their expertise can be used to support collective learning in class or other school activities
- draw on students' different languages, cultures, values, knowledges, and practices as resources for the learning of all
- use what the research literature says about teaching and learning to inform your choice of strategies to use with your students
- use both information about your own students and what curriculum support documents say about teaching and learning to help you select the best strategies and to prioritise what you teach
- use the knowledge that parents and whānau have about their child to support the child's learning
- engage students in specific and timely feedback and feedforward on their learning
- engage in in-depth curriculum-related discussions with individuals or groups
- analyse the impact your teaching has on each student's learning

- use student feedback on your teaching to work out what is most important to focus on and the best strategies to use.

School practices reported by few teachers as being ‘very like our school’

Listed below are school practices that 25% or fewer teachers rated as being very like their school. Here we see that some of the conditions necessary for teachers to improve their practice are often not sufficiently available. It therefore makes it more difficult for inquiry to be used in schools to make worthwhile changes in teaching and learning. Co-constructing curriculum with and for Māori and seeking expertise from the local community, hapū, and iwi is also challenging for many teachers:

- teachers have sufficient time for collaborative work
- teaching time is protected from unnecessary interruptions
- time for teacher inquiry and evaluative work is protected
- teachers have sufficient time to discuss student progress and plan teaching together
- curriculum in each learning area draws on and adds to content relevant to the identities of Māori students
- we actively seek the expertise of the local community, hapū, and iwi
- we have used inquiry to make worthwhile changes in our teaching and student learning
- effective teaching resources aligned to the school are readily available
- school goals really do guide our day-to-day work.

Correlations between teaching practices, school practices, and principal leadership

Overall, there is a high correlation between principal leadership practices and school practices. Teachers who perceive their principal as leading very well are also likely to report high levels of the school practices that are associated with positive student outcomes. The relationship between school practices and teaching practices is moderate, raising some questions about the coherence in some areas between what happens at the school level, and for teachers, particularly in relation to teaching as inquiry. Teaching practice and principal leadership have a low correlation, consistent with other research on the pathway between leadership and teaching being mainly through school practices.

Variation between schools

We found considerable variability between individual schools when we looked at the proportion of teachers

in a school who reported that they or their principal did things very well, or things being very like their school. This indicates that there are schools that have much to share, as well as schools that have much to learn. There were also some items where the variability was less, and the median school proportion was low. These overlap with the challenges identified above, with the addition of:

- working collaboratively
- keeping up to date with new knowledge
- having challenging goals for every student.

Kāhui Ako—working collaboratively a cross schools

Collaborative inquiry and sharing of effective practices across schools are key drivers for the gains expected for teaching and learning from Communities of Learning | Kāhui Ako, the most recent policy platform designed to improve teaching and learning. Most are still in an emergent stage. In the national data generated by the TSP, 70% of the teachers were in schools belonging to a Kāhui Ako. Teachers indicated that Kāhui Ako participation gave 40% of them opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, 34% indicated support for their capacity for inquiry, and 34% thought it strengthened their own teaching practice well or very well. Those in the new roles of across-school teachers gained the most, followed by those in the new within-school teaching roles. We will track the reported benefits from Kāhui Ako participation over time to contribute to the evaluation of this policy.

We found that gains from Kāhui Ako participation were related to the level of collaborative practices within teachers’ own schools, suggesting that they are mutually supportive. We have created a scale of collaborative school practices to track changes over time at the national level in relation to evaluating the impact of policy changes, including the recent changes to Ministry-funded professional learning and development.

The question of time

Only 43% of teachers and 34% of principals thought their workload was sustainable and only 32% of principals thought that they could schedule enough time for the educational leadership part of their job.

Time is a key resource in teaching and learning, and school leadership. While we have become more sophisticated in what we include in *The New Zealand Curriculum*, particularly about more effective pedagogy, we appear to have added these new understandings onto existing structures, rather than, for example, changing the way we organise the school

day. The new understandings of effective pedagogy appear to have been insufficiently supported through professional learning or development, or guidance.

National levels of practices

Teachers' responses to each of the three sets of items (Teaching Practices, School Practices, and Principal Leadership) form three psychometric scales. These show the national distribution of practices. We can compare national distributions on these scales over time, allowing us to evaluate whether the policy, support, and practice that occurs is improving teaching and school practices and principal leadership practices that affect student outcomes.

This first national picture of New Zealand teaching and school practices, and principal leadership shows the strengths we have as a system, and the challenges that need collective purpose and focused and coherent work if we are to improve teaching and learning, and the outcomes for our students.

Using the national picture to support ongoing improvement

The TSP findings provide a common language for teachers, school leaders, those they work with to develop their capabilities, and the government agencies to work together and identify where different expertise and focus could be best placed to improve teaching and learning. There are some key areas of practice that we would identify as fruitful to focus on in a coherent way across the school system.

Most are present in the Professional Standards, and ERO's evaluation indicators, and guidance for Kāhui Ako, and *The New Zealand Curriculum*. The TSP national picture shows that these four frameworks need more support to play the roles expected of them.

These key practice areas are:

- developing student agency in their learning, including their understanding of how to participate in and contribute to community
- developing 21st century skills such as critical thinking
- drawing on students' differences as resources for all
- supporting Māori student identities
- strengthening partnerships with parents and whānau around student learning
- teaching as inquiry
- ensuring that teachers get the time they need to undertake inquiry and collaborative work (e.g., by reworking school days and allocations).

The TSP shows that there are schools and teachers we can learn from, but that we have to think how schools and teachers can best learn from each other, and how that fits with what is being asked of them by government agencies, and the support they can call on to develop and use new understandings.