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Overview: Social studies in the 2009 assessment is characterised by wide variation in performance within tasks, moderate growth in overall performance from year 4 to year 8, and little change in performance levels from the 2005 assessment. Socio-economic status (SES) continues to be the dominant factor that influences performance in social studies. In general, students are not particularly positive about social studies as a curriculum area (it ranks third from the bottom of 14 subject areas that children were asked about), but students are enthusiastic about learning more about certain aspects of this subject, in particular learning about the future and learning about other places in New Zealand and the world.



New Zealand's National Education Monitoring Project commenced in 1993, with the task of assessing and reporting on the achievement of New Zealand primary school children in all areas of the school curriculum. Children are assessed at two class levels: year 4 (halfway through primary education) and year 8 (at the end of primary education). Different curriculum areas and skills are assessed each year, over a four-year cycle. The main goal of national monitoring is to provide detailed information about what children can do so that patterns of performance can be recognised, successes celebrated, and desirable changes to educational practices and resources identified and implemented.

Each year, small random samples of children are selected nationally, then assessed in their own schools by teachers specially seconded and trained for this work. Task instructions are given orally by teachers, on laptop computers, or in writing. Many of the assessment tasks involve the children in the use of

equipment and supplies. Their responses are presented orally, by demonstration, in writing, in computer files, or through submission of other physical products. Many of the responses are recorded on videotape for subsequent analysis.

The use of many tasks with both year 4 and year 8 students allows comparisons of the performance of year 4 and 8 students in 2009. Because some tasks have been used twice, in 2005 and again in 2009, trends in performance across the four-year period can also be analysed.

In 2009, the third year of the fourth cycle of national monitoring, three areas were assessed: mathematics, social studies and information skills. This report presents details and results of the assessments of social studies.



ASSESSING SOCIAL STUDIES

Chapter 2 explains the place of social studies in the New Zealand curriculum and presents the social studies framework. The 2005 framework identified five areas of knowledge or curriculum strands: social organisation; culture and heritage; place and environment; time, continuity and change; and resources and economic activities. Two of those strands were merged in the 2009 framework, where they are linked to five key processes and placed in the context of local, regional and global communities. The importance of attitudes and motivation is also highlighted.

It should be noted that New Zealand has introduced a new curriculum which is being implemented fully in 2010. Half of the tasks in these assessments were developed in 2005 and the remainder in 2009. So it is appropriate, in this report, to use the curriculum structure that applied until 2010.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Chapter 3 presents the students' results on eight tasks concerning social organisation. Students did fairly well on those tasks that were pertinent to their lives, but when the task called for knowledge about electoral procedures or how a group should work out a broader social problem, many students had difficulty in discussing the issues involved.

Averaged across 84 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 13% more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Between 2005 and 2009, there were small declines for both year 4 and year 8 students. Averaged across 32 trend task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, 1%



fewer students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005. At year 8 level, with 42 trend task components included, on average 2% fewer students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005.

IDENTITY, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Chapter 4 concerns issues of identity, culture and heritage and involves eight tasks. Students did not display a strong knowledge of culture and heritage issues and icons of New Zealand. They were fairly successful on a task concerning the national anthem (p22), but did not fare as well when discussing acceptable activities and behaviour in a whareniui (meeting house) (p21), or explaining the symbolism of the national flag (p20).



Averaged across 88 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 8% more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. On the trend tasks, there was little change in performance from 2005 to 2009 for either year 4 or year 8 students. Averaged across the 63 trend task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, there was no meaningful change between 2005 and 2009. At year 8 level, again with 63 trend task components included, on average 1% fewer students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005.

PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 5 presents the students' results on eight tasks concerning place and environment. Year 8 students were generally successful on these tasks, but many year 4 students had substantial difficulty with them. Year 8 students were particularly strong at locating places in New Zealand.

Averaged across 67 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 13% more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components.



On the trend tasks, there was a small decline at both year 4 and year 8 between 2005 and 2009. Averaged across 34 trend task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, 2% fewer students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005. At year 8, again with 34 trend task components included, a 2% average decline was seen from 2005 to 2009.

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Chapter 6 addresses the results of students' efforts on eight tasks concerning continuity and change. This area was marked by wide variability in performance as well as strong growth from year 4 to year 8 in some, but not all, tasks. Although many students at both years performed quite well on these tasks, other students struggled with them.



Averaged across 63 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 12% more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Performance in 2009 dropped slightly from 2005. Averaged across 15 components attempted by year 4 students, 2% fewer students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005. At year 8 level, across 26 task components, again 2% fewer students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005.

RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

Chapter 7 presents the results from students' efforts on seven tasks concerning resources and economic activities. These tasks often required students to look at both sides of a complex or controversial issue. Students were moderately successful at discussing these issues and were frequently able to come up with creative solutions or approaches to the problems. There was considerable variability in performance at both year 4 and year 8.

Averaged across 31 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 12% more year 8

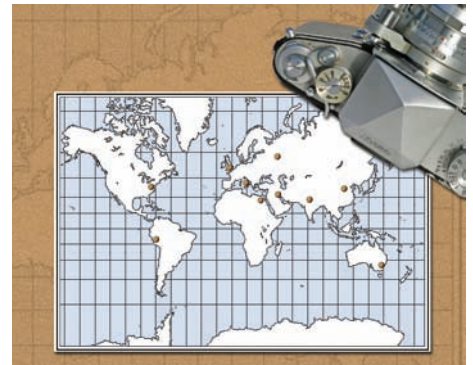


than year 4 students succeeded with these components. On the trend tasks, there was little change at year 8, but a small decline at year 4. Averaged across 30 task components on three tasks, 4% fewer year 4 students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005. At year 8 level, averaged across 56 components on four tasks, 1% more students succeeded in 2009 than in 2005.

SOCIAL STUDIES SURVEY

Chapter 8 focuses on the results of the Social Studies survey. Social studies has never been a popular subject area with students since the initial assessment in 1997. It is regularly in the bottom three or four subjects in terms of preference, and ratings have actually declined from 1997 at both year 4 and year 8. When asked to list their favourite three subjects, social studies is only mentioned by 3% of year 4 students (down from 5% in 1997) and by

6% of year 8 students (down from 16% in 1997). There has also been a strong decline in how much students think they are learning about social studies. There are, however, aspects of social studies that students are keen to learn about, notably living in the future, to which 70% of year 4 students and 62% of year 8 students give the highest rating when asked if they would like to learn more about this topic.



PERFORMANCE OF SUBGROUPS

Chapter 9 details the results of analyses comparing the performance of different demographic subgroups, both at the student level and the school level. At the school level, as has been the case in previous NEMP assessments, the socio-economic status (SES) of the school that children attend, as measured by the school decile rating, has proven to be the strongest predictor of success on the social studies tasks. School type (full primary, intermediate, or year 7 to 13 high school), school size, community size and geographic zone were not important factors predicting achievement on social studies tasks.

At the student level, effect sizes were used to examine differences. Effect size is the difference in mean (average) performance of the two groups, divided by the pooled standard deviation of the scores on the particular task. For this summary, these effect sizes were averaged across all tasks.

Gender differences were small on the social studies tasks. For year 4 students, the mean-effect size across the 28 tasks was 0.11 (girls averaged 0.11 standard deviations higher than boys); this is a small difference. For year 8 students, the mean-effect size across the 32 tasks was 0.04 (boys averaged 0.04 standard

deviations higher than girls); this is a very small difference.

Differences in performance on social studies tasks by ethnicity were moderate. On Pakeha/Māori comparisons, for year 4 students, the mean-effect size across the 28 tasks was 0.30 (Pakeha students averaged 0.30 standard deviations higher than Māori students). For year 8 students, the mean-effect size across the 32 tasks was also 0.30 (Pakeha students averaged 0.30 standard deviations higher than Māori students).

On Pakeha/Pasifika comparisons, for year 4 students, the mean-effect size across the 28 tasks was 0.39 (Pakeha students averaged 0.39 standard deviations higher than Pasifika students). For year 8 students, the mean-effect size across the 32 tasks was 0.37 (Pakeha students averaged 0.37 standard deviations higher than Pasifika students). These differences are near the upper end of the moderate range.

Differences associated with the predominant language spoken at home were small to moderate. For year 4 students, the mean-effect size across the 28 tasks was 0.17 (students for whom English was the predominant language at home averaged 0.17 standard deviations higher than the other students). This is a small difference. For year 8 students, the mean-effect size across the 32 tasks was 0.30 (students for whom English was the predominant language at home averaged 0.30 standard deviations higher than the other students). This is a moderate difference.

OVERALL TRENDS

Overall trends can be assessed by considering all trend tasks from Chapters 3 to 7. For year 4 students, based on 174 components, on average 1% fewer students succeeded with those task components in 2009 than in 2005. For year 8 students, based on 221 task components, on average 1% fewer students succeeded with those task components in 2009 than in 2005. Both of these trends are too small to be meaningful.

In the report on the 2005 social studies assessments, averaged across all trend task components, about 2% more students succeeded with those components in 2005 than in 2001. This was true at both year 4 and year 8 levels. Four years earlier, the 2001 report compared performance in 1997 and 2001, showing an increase of 2.5% at year 4 level and a decrease of 1% at year 8 level.

Overall then, despite the very small decrease in performance between 2005 and 2009, there appears to have been a small gain in the performance of year 4 students over the 12 years between 1997 and 2009. At year 8 level, the evidence suggests no change in social studies performance overall for that same 12-year period.

