

# A Acknowledgements

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- ▶ members of the Project's National Advisory Committee
- ▶ members of the Project's Writing Advisory Panel
- ▶ principals and children of the schools where tasks were trialled
- ▶ principals, staff and Board of Trustee members of the 255 schools included in the 2006 sample
- ▶ the 2878 children who participated in the assessments and their parents
- ▶ the 96 teachers who administered the assessments to the children
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- ▶ the 205 teachers who assisted with the marking of tasks early in 2007.

**New Zealand's National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) 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.**



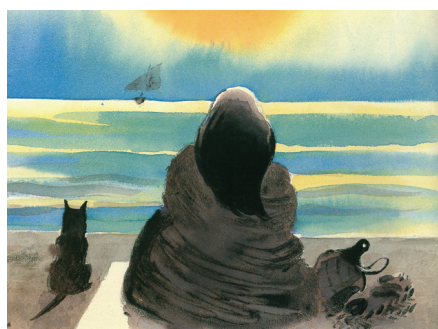
Each year, small random samples of children are selected nationally, then assessed in their own schools by teachers specially seconded and trained for this work. Task instructions are given orally by teachers, through video presentations, or in writing. Many of the assessment tasks involve the children in the use of equipment and supplies. Their responses are presented orally, by demonstration, in writing, or through submission of other physical products. Many of the responses are recorded on videotape for subsequent analysis.



In 2006, the fourth year of the third cycle of national monitoring, two areas were assessed: health and physical education, and the writing, listening and viewing components of the English curriculum. This report presents details and results of the assessments of students' skills, knowledge, perceptions and attitudes relating to writing.

## ASSESSING WRITING

**Chapter 2** presents the NEMP framework for writing. It has as its central organising theme creating, constructing and communicating meaning in written forms for various purposes and audiences. Within it are listed nine understandings, five main purposes for writing (and 17 specific ways of achieving them) and 20 skills, together with student attitudes toward and involvement in writing.



## EXPRESSIVE WRITING

**Chapter 3** focuses on expressive writing, in which students were given freedom to write inventively, within task guidelines. Characteristics sought included ability to write coherently, to communicate personal feeling, to communicate stories or ideas clearly and vividly, and to follow conventions associated with particular forms of writing.

Averaged across 36 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students in 2006, 24 percent more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Year 8 students performed better on all of the components. Medium proportions of year 4 students and higher proportions of year 8 students followed the task guidelines quite well, but most students were not able to achieve the clarity, richness, and personal feeling or humour that distinguished top quality writing.

Trend analyses showed a substantial improvement since 2002 for year 4 students and a modest improvement for year 8 students. Averaged across 17 task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, eight percent more students succeeded in 2006 than in 2002. Gains occurred on 16 components, with no change on the remaining component. At year 8 level, again with 17 task components included in the analysis, on average five percent more students succeeded with the task components in 2006 than in 2002. Gains occurred on 12 components, with losses on two components and no change on the remaining three components.



## FUNCTIONAL WRITING

**Chapter 4** explores functional writing. Students were asked to present information clearly and accurately in written form. They acted as reporters, gave instructions, prepared advertisements, filled in forms and wrote letters, descriptions, messages and formal reports.

Averaged across 102 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 18 percent more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Year 8 students scored higher on 89 components, lower on seven components and no different on six components.

Trend analyses showed a small improvement between 2002 and 2006 for year 4 students and a slight improvement for year 8 students (the latter probably too small to be judged

significant). Averaged across 47 task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, just over three percent more students succeeded in 2006 than in 2002. Gains occurred on 35 components, with losses on 11 components and no change on one component. At year 8 level, again with 47 task components included in the analysis, on average two percent more students succeeded with the task components in 2006 than in 2002. Gains occurred on 29 components, with losses on nine components and no change on the remaining nine components.



## WRITING CONVENTIONS

**Chapter 5** examines students' performance in spelling, punctuation and grammar, using tasks specifically designed for this purpose. These skills were also assessed more indirectly within some of the tasks in Chapters 3 and 4.

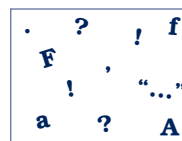
Averaged across 77 task components administered to both year 4 and year 8 students, 15 percent more year 8 than year 4 students succeeded with these components. Year 8 students performed better on all except five

of the components. Punctuation of text involving speech and recognition of verbs in text (especially those associated with "to be" and "to have") were areas of particular weakness.

Trend analyses showed slight improvements between 2002 and 2006 for both year 4 and year 8 students, but these were too small to be judged significant. Averaged across 39 task components attempted by year 4 students in both years, 2.5 percent more students succeeded in

2006 than in 2002.

Gains occurred on 29 components, with losses on four components and no



change on six components. At year 8 level, with 63 task components included in the analysis, on average one percent more students succeeded with the task components in 2006 than in 2002. Gains occurred on 33 components, with losses on 18 components and no change on the remaining 12 components.

## WRITING SURVEY

**Chapter 6** reports the results of surveys of students' attitudes about and involvement in writing activities, and their perceptions of their capabilities. Students' attitudes, interests and liking for a subject have a strong bearing on progress and learning outcomes.

Writing stories was the most popular school writing activity for year 4 and year 8 students, with poems, letters and writing in other school subjects also quite popular. In their own time, year 4 students most liked writing stories, but year 8 students most liked writing text messages.



To be good writers, students at both levels thought that people needed to use their imagination. Year 4 students also placed emphasis on being willing to try things out and checking their work, while year 8 students emphasised liking writing and learning how to use punctuation. About 35 percent of students at both levels reported using a computer for writing at school "heaps" or "quite a lot", but at home this rose to 50 percent of year 4 students and 60 percent of year 8 students.

There have been no large changes on the other 13 rating items between 1998 and 2006, at either year level. The most interesting change for year 4 students is an increase in reported enjoyment of writing in their own time. For year 8 students, there have been modest declines in enjoyment of writing at school and in the percentage of students who report that their teacher reads their writing frequently.

## PERFORMANCE OF SUBGROUPS

**Chapter 7** reports the results of analyses that compared the performance of different demographic subgroups. 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 the writing tasks at year 8 level. The same was true for the 2002 and 1998 assessments. The evidence was more mixed at year 4 level. There were statistically significant differences by school size for just seven percent of tasks (similar to the six percent in 2002 and zero percent in 1998). However, there were differences by community size for 20 percent of the tasks, and by zone (region) for 30 percent of the tasks. Comparative figures in 2002 and 1998 were zero and four percent for community size and 14 and 13 percent for zone.

There were statistically significant differences in the performance of students from low, medium and high decile schools on 63 percent of the tasks at year 4 level (compared to 72 percent in 2002 and 83 percent in 1998) and 52 percent of the tasks at year 8 level (compared to 83 percent in 2002 and 72 percent in 1998). These changes indicate a useful reduction in disparities of achievement.

For the comparisons of boys with girls, Pakeha with Māori, Pakeha with Pasifika students, and students for whom the predominant language at home was English with those for whom it was not, effect sizes were used. 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.

Year 4 girls averaged moderately higher than boys, with a mean effect size of 0.28 (similar to the effect size of 0.24 in 2002). Year 8 girls also averaged moderately higher than boys, with a mean effect size of 0.33 (reduced a little from 0.40 in 2002). As was also true in 2002, the writing survey results at both year levels showed quite strong evidence that girls were more positive than boys about writing activities.

Pakeha students averaged moderately higher than Māori students, with mean effect sizes of 0.34 for year 4 students and 0.23 for year 8 students (the corresponding figures in 2002 were 0.34 and 0.38, so the 2006 results represent substantial reduction of disparity for year 8 students).

Pakeha students averaged moderately higher than Pasifika students, with mean effect sizes of 0.26 for year 4 students and 0.29 for year 8 students (revealing strongly reduced disparities of performance compared to 2002, when the effect sizes were 0.50 and 0.52). As was also true in 2002, the writing survey results showed that Pasifika students were more enthusiastic about writing and more involved in sharing their writing with others.

Compared to students for whom the predominant language at home was English, students from homes where other languages predominated performed comparably well at year 4 level and slightly lower at year 8 level, with effect sizes of 0.01 and 0.14 respectively. Comparative figures are not available for the assessments in 2002.