





Students' attitudes, interests and liking for a subject have a strong bearing on their achievement. The *Social studies survey* sought information from students about their curriculum preferences and perceptions of their achievement. The questions were the same for year 4 and year 8 students. The survey was administered to the students in an independent tasks session (four students working individually on tasks, supported by a teacher). The questions were read to year 4 students, and also to individual year 8 students who requested this help. Writing help was available if requested.

The survey included five items which asked students to record a rating response by circling their choice, one item which asked students to select three options from a list, and three items which invited students to write comments.





The students were first asked to select their three favourite school subjects from a list of twelve subjects. Among the year 4 students, art was the most popular subject, listed as first, second or third choice by 68 percent of year 4 students. Physical education came second (47 percent), mathematics third (42) percent, reading fourth (30 percent), and music fifth (27 percent). Social studies came in tenth place (5 percent). Among the year 8 students, physical education was first (57 percent), art second (43 percent), mathematics third (35 percent), technology fourth (30 percent), music fifth (25 percent), and science sixth (23 percent). Social studies came in seventh place on 16 percent, tied with reading.

Responses to the five rating items are presented in separate tables for Year 4 students (below) and year 8 students (overleaf). The results show that, compared to year 4 students, fewer year 8 students were highly positive about doing social studies at school, highly positive about how much they learned in social studies at school, or wanting additional school time spent on social studies. Year 8 students were also less likely to believe that their class did lots of good things in social studies, or to be very positive about learning or doing more social studies as they got older. The strong differences were almost entirely focused at the top end of the scales; there were no corresponding differences at the bottom ends. The differences found at the top end may, at least partly, reflect the well-known tendency of students to get more jaded about schoolwork as they get older. Such differences have been found repeatedly in our other national monitoring surveys.

RESPONSES OF YEAR 4 STUDENTS TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES SURVEY

				
1. How do you feel about learning or doing more social studies as you get older?	51	27	12	10
2. How much do you like doing social studies at school?	41	38	12	9
3. How much do you think you learn in social studies at school?	50	35	12	3
4. Would you like to do more, the same or less social studies at school?	<i>more</i> 36	<i>about the same</i> 46	<i>less</i> 18	
5. How often does your class do really good things in social studies?	<i>lots</i> 18	<i>quite a lot</i> 30	<i>sometimes</i> 48	<i>never</i> 4

RESPONSES OF YEAR 8 STUDENTS TO THE SOCIAL STUDIES SURVEY

				
1. How do you feel about learning or doing more social studies as you get older?	26	50	19	5
2. How much do you like doing social studies at school?	19	52	23	6
3. How much do you think you learn in social studies at school?	29	54	14	3
4. Would you like to do more, the same or less social studies at school?	<i>more</i> 16	<i>about the same</i> 67	<i>less</i> 17	
5. How often does your class do really good things in social studies?	<i>lots</i> 5	<i>quite a lot</i> 30	<i>sometimes</i> 59	<i>never</i> 6

An open-ended question asked students “what sorts of things do you like learning about in social studies?” The students’ responses were coded into nine categories.

At year four level, 41 percent of students wrote responses which were coded as science-related topics, such as the planets, animals, and environmental issues. In many schools, social studies at year 4 level is taught alongside science in “themes”, so perhaps students are not really clear what thematic work is social studies and what is science. Forty percent of year 4 students liked learning about other countries, people and cultures. The next most popular response category only attracted 9 percent of year four students. It related to skills such as mapping and map interpretation. Studying history (including New Zealand history) attracted about 7 percent support, with the remaining categories attracting 2 percent or less.

At year 8 level, 47 percent of students said they liked learning about other countries, people, and cultures. About 25 percent liked learning about history, including New Zealand history. The proportion mentioning science topics was much lower than for year 4 students, but still substantial (14 percent). The mapping skills category and learning about famous people both drew 7 percent support. The remaining categories attracted less than 5 percent support.

A second open-ended question asked students “is there something you have done in social studies that you are really proud of?” The students’ responses were coded into nine categories. Only about 45 percent of year 4 students and 47 percent of year 8 students responded meaningfully to this question. Five response categories were used very little (for up to 4 percent of the students). The remaining four response categories were used for 7 to 15 percent of the students at both levels. The most used category related to products (such as reports) that had received positive feedback from teachers or classmates. A second category related to pride in drawing skills, making things or otherwise presenting work well. The final two categories referred to topics related to other countries and cultures, and topics related to science.

The third open-ended question asked students to “tell any things you don’t like doing in social studies.” Their responses were coded into eight categories. The most common complaint of both year 4 students (17 percent) and year 8 students (25 percent) related to the writing and spelling demands of their social studies work. The next most common complaints related to classroom process requirements (such as listening, waiting, copying information, working in groups, speaking) and special skill requirements (such as finding information and drawing). Taken together, these two categories were used by 13 percent of year 4 students and 20 percent of year 8 students. The other response category that was used fairly frequently (by 13 percent of year 4 students and 10 percent of year 8 students), related to specific topics that were disliked (for instance, the Treaty of Waitangi).