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Written Reporting

*Exploring School Approaches and Parental
Understandings*

Rowena Clare Pearson

*A thesis submitted in complete fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Education, The University of Auckland, 2014.*

ABSTRACT

In this study an interpretive framework was used, and a qualitative approach taken, to explore both how schools report in writing to parents and what parents understand of their child's achievement and progress from reading written reports. The eight participants in the study were all parents of primary age children who attend schools in New Zealand. Data were gathered in two ways. Semi-structured interviews with participants took place in which they were asked about their child's most recent written report. In addition the researcher analysed copies of the written reports.

Reports conveyed information about student progress and achievement through both narrative comment and tables/charts. There was however little commonality between the reports apart from the use of the National Standards to report student progress and achievement. Whilst parents had a broad understanding of the key messages of their child's report their understandings often appeared to be superficial. Confusion was caused by the inclusion of technical language and the use of varying points of reference that parents did not fully understand.

It is concluded that whilst schools and teachers had clearly gone to great lengths to produce reports, the documents did not always help parents develop a full understanding of their child's progress and achievement.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Reporting to parents has been an integral part of the education landscape for many years. It is a multi-faceted process involving a number of different stakeholders – in particular it is an important part of the partnership between parents and teachers (Ministry of Education, 2012c; O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 2002). Many types of communication are identified by schools as part of their reporting process, from the more casual conversation at the classroom door at the end of the school day, to the formal, written end of year report. Some are predominantly characterised by the voice of the adult stakeholder, for example the casual 'chat', others are more inclusive of 'student voice', for example three way conferences and student portfolios. Each type of communication is an opportunity for the sharing of information between teacher and parent and each happens with variable frequency, following different patterns and timings. One might then think, with this plethora of information, parents would consider themselves well informed about their child's achievement and progress, yet it is often heard that this is not the case. It has been suggested for instance that parents do not necessarily find their child's written report clear or that it provides them useful information about their child's learning (Marino et al., 2001; Power & Clark, 2000; Walker, 1998).

The formal, written report parents receive is the most common way in which schools communicate information about student learning to their parent community. It is the written report that is the focus of this study. Little has been published about parental understanding of school reports in New Zealand since the paucity of available information was highlighted by Hattie and Peddie (2003). It is particularly timely to be investigating parental understanding of written school reports at this time given the recent changes in reporting requirements in New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

Reporting in New Zealand (2000 – present day)

The National Administration Guidelines (NAGs) outline requirements for schools in New Zealand when reporting to parents (Ministry of Education, 2010b). Prior

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to 2009 the requirements placed on schools regarding reporting to parents were minimal. Earlier education reforms which took place in the 1980s had led to a decentralised approach where ‘self-managing’ schools had considerable freedom to interpret what requirements there were (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins, & Reid, 2009) and to some extent this resulted in The Ministry of Education adopting a relatively ‘laissez-faire’ approach. Whilst required to gather assessment data relating to student achievement across the curriculum, schools had the freedom to determine, in consultation with their Boards of Trustees, how they gathered this information, what they reported and when reporting was carried out. Little guidance was provided regarding effective ways to report – schools were free to devise their own procedures and formats.

In 2008 New Zealand had a change of government. As part of their election manifesto, the National Party had outlined a “Crusade for Literacy and Numeracy” (The National Party, 2008) aimed at helping “*ensure that children get the basic skills they need to do well at school*” (p.1). The manifesto set out proposed requirements that would be placed upon schools regarding the assessment of students in relation to proposed National Standards, and for schools to report to parents, family and whanau about “*how their child is doing compared to National Standards and compared to other children their age*” (p.1). Once in government, the main points of the manifesto were set out in the Education (National Standards) Amendment Act, 2008.

The introduction of National Standards has seen revised reporting requirements put in place through the National Administration Guidelines (Ministry of Education 2010b). From 2010 schools have been required to report twice yearly in writing to parents, families and whanau about each child’s progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to the National Standards. This is in contrast to the requirements in England where schools must report in relation to the wider curriculum as well (Department for Education and Skills, 2005). In the junior years of primary school the points where achievement and progress are specifically reported coincide with the anniversary of a child’s entry into schooling. Further through the primary school, reporting takes place at the end of the school year. In addition, interim reports are to be provided to

identify achievement and progress along the way. It is required that the reports be written in plain language (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

National Standards in Reading and Writing

By the end of 2009, the Ministry of Education had in place documents codifying the standards that students are expected to achieve at certain points in their education (Ministry of Education, 2009b, 2009c). The Ministry of Education (2009c) has described the standards as

a nationally consistent means for considering, explaining, and responding to students' progress and achievement in years 1–8. They provide reference points, or signposts, that describe the achievement, in reading, writing, and mathematics, that will enable students to meet the demands of the New Zealand Curriculum. They will help teachers to make judgments about their students' progress so that the students and their teachers, parents, families, and whānau can agree on the next learning goals. (p.4).

Structure of the standards

The overall structure of the Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1-8 (2009c) and the Mathematics Standards for Years 1-8 (2009b) is very similar. Each of the documents outlining the standards contains an introduction; sections focusing on professional understandings about and use of the standards; a glossary of relevant professional vocabulary; the standards students are expected to achieve at each stage of their education and 'illustrations' of the standards. The standards statements themselves are brief. For example, after one year at school, in written language:

students will create texts as they learn in a range of contexts across the New Zealand Curriculum within level 1. Students will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas and information to meet specific learning purposes across the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2009c).

and after one year at school, in mathematics:

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students will be achieving at early level 1 in the mathematics and statistics learning area of the New Zealand Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2009b).

Additional information about the types of response that can be expected from students at each level is available in the 'Key Characteristics' and 'Illustrating the standard' sections of the standards documents (Ministry of Education, 2009b, 2009c). While the Mathematics document (Ministry of Education, 2009b) has a similar structure to that of the Reading and Writing document, the format of the standards statements is somewhat different. For example, Mathematics standards are presented in relation to the curriculum strands of number and algebra, geometry and measurement, and statistics. As well as the standards documents there is a plethora of support material available for teachers e.g. Effective literacy practice (Ministry of Education, 2003a, 2003b); National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007); Literacy Learning Progressions (Ministry of Education, 2010a); English Language Learning Progressions (Ministry of Education, 2008).

Reaction to the introduction of the standards

Many stakeholders have voiced opposition to National Standards (Thrupp & Easter, 2012). Professional organisations such as the New Zealand Educational Institute Te Riu Roa (NZEI), NZ Principals' Federation and the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) have launched campaigns to highlight the issues about National Standards, inform schools and parents about their concerns and register their grave doubts about the Standards (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2008). The New Zealand Principals Federation mounted a concerted campaign against the introduction of the standards which included media releases, use of social media, provision of information and resources (Thrupp & Easter, 2012). Principals' anger has been evident as they have been forced to implement an initiative which many believe to be fundamentally at odds with their responsibility to deliver high quality education for their students and to act in the best interests of the children (Crombie, 2011; New Zealand Principals' Federation, 2010).

Academics have also expressed concerns about the system. These concerns have related to the structure of the standards, the fuzzy standards descriptors, the challenges for teachers in making sound, defensible judgements against the standards statements, the impact that an inadequately devised and untried system could have on students and the possibility that league tables will be produced (Elley, 2010; Flockton, 2010; Thrupp, Hattie, Crooks, & Flockton, 2009). Senior academics wrote an open letter to the Minister of Education outlining their concerns (Thrupp et al., 2009). A petition was presented at Parliament and supporting submissions made (NZPA, 2010) (Courtney, 2010a). The introduction of the standards was far from plain sailing for the Government.

National Standards and reporting to parents

Claims have been made about the educational benefits that will be delivered following the implementation of National Standards. One of the key benefits is that parents will be better informed about their child's progress and achievement in relation to the standards and will be informed about how they can help their child at home (Ministry of Education, 2012c). It would seem to be common sense that if you give parents information in plain language then they will know where their child is at and how to proceed in supporting them. The provision of information, in plain language, will therefore enable parents to be more active partners in their child's learning. It is suggested that effective partnerships with parents, will lead to improved student learning outcomes. (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d)

However, these claims rest on a number of assumptions that are problematic and unrealistic, as will be evidenced in the following chapters. The statements assume that the reporting process is relatively straightforward when, in fact, honest, accurate and clear reporting is challenging for those involved. Hattie (2010) states that:

The success of national standards will depend on parents understanding school reports and not merely on satisfaction with or independent reviews of the quality of school reports. Clarity and satisfaction are not the aims; the aim is dependable interpretation (p.10).

The usefulness of the National Standards in helping teachers provide parents with clear, understandable reports on their child's progress and achievement has yet to be demonstrated. The New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) (2009) for instance, have cautioned that National Standards "*have the potential to improve reporting to parents, provided their introduction is well supported and done for the purpose of continual learning, rather than to label and blame schools*" (p.1).

Summary

Clearly there are challenges for schools and teachers in reporting in a clear, honest and constructive manner that can be easily understood by parents. The aim of the current study is to explore parents' understanding of their child's achievement and progress as conveyed through formal school reporting processes. The study is guided by the overarching questions:

How is student progress and achievement communicated to parents in a formal written report?

What understandings do parents have regarding their child's achievement and progress as communicated to them through formal, written school reports?

The thesis is divided into seven chapters. This first chapter gives a brief outline of the rationale for the study, considers reporting in the New Zealand context and states the key questions to be answered. Chapter 2 investigates the literature relating to parental understanding of reports. Chapter 3 explains the research methods used to conduct the study. Chapters 4 and 5 set out the findings of the research. Chapter 6 discusses issues raised by the study. Chapter 7 presents a summary of findings, draw conclusions and suggests future implications for schools and teachers.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of literature in three main sections. The first section explores the nature and relevance of partnerships between schools, teachers and parents. The second section investigates written reporting in relation to National Standards and includes a consideration of the formats of reports and the different ways that schools represent student progress and achievement on written reports. It also looks at the challenges facing teachers when making Overall Teacher Judgements (OTJs) and the impact of this on reporting to parents. The third section examines parental understanding of written reports. Themes from New Zealand literature over the last fifteen years are explored. Whilst this is prior to the introduction of National Standards, as is demonstrated, the issues are still relevant today.

Partnership between schools, teachers and parents

Partnerships between schools, teachers and parents are seen as a central purpose of reporting to which the Ministry of Education attributes the potential to improve student learning outcomes. Through its website Te Kete Ipurangi (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b) the Ministry of Education identifies the purpose of reporting as:

(providing) information about a child's learning, progress and achievement that can then be used to support further learning. (para.1)

This indicates that the Ministry sees student learning and development as purposes for reporting to parents. The Ministry of Education expands on this, emphasising the importance of teachers communicating clear, dependable information about progress and achievement. Reporting in this manner

provides a basis for building a strong partnership between the child, the teacher and the child's parents, family and whanau to support learning and improve student outcomes. (para.1)

Partnership is a complex process, enacted in different ways and delivering different outcomes (Bastiani, 1993; Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003). The ability of parental involvement in their child's education to contribute to improved student outcomes has been identified in research (Biddulph et al., 2003). The Best Evidence Synthesis (Biddulph et al., 2003) investigated evidence about the impact that family and community involvement can have on student outcomes within the New Zealand context. It was identified that planned and structured activities such as providing parents with information about available resources, engaging in shared activities, providing resources and the development of respectful, collaborative relationships can all contribute to the development of positive parent/school partnerships. It was also stated that these activities can lead to improved student achievement (Biddulph et al., 2003). The emphasis in this Best Evidence Synthesis is on a broad interpretation of partnership which is, nonetheless, learning focussed.

Similar themes about partnership emerge in other literature. The importance of information 'flow' between all parties has been raised (Bastiani, 1993). Without this parents will be unable to be fully engaged in supporting their child's learning and will more likely be the "*passive recipients of information*" (Absolum, Flockton, Hattie, Hipkins & Reid, 2009, p.29). It is proposed that the focus of partnership should be on developing a reciprocal relationship with parents where they are provided with clear information which includes detail about 'where the child is at' and what future priorities for learning should be (Absolum et al., 2009). It is also suggested that parents should have some understanding of the assessment practices that have been used to gather information (Bastiani, 1993).

A theory of partnership is proposed by Timperley and Robinson (2002). Their model recognises the complexity of partnership between stakeholders and suggests that, in order to be effective the partnership should have as its basis an informed, mutually accountable relationship in which power is distributed as equitably as possible between partners whilst recognising that this is a challenging and evolving endeavour (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). The stakeholders should understand their developing roles within the partnership and take on differing responsibilities which contribute to the accomplishment of the task upon

which they are focussed (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). The Ministry of Education addresses the nature of these roles stating that for schools and teachers this involves supporting a “learning focussed relationship” (Ministry of Education n.d.-d) with the student and their parents. This should be achieved whilst building student capability to contribute to conversations about their learning, providing clear information to the family including information about how to support their child’s learning (Ministry of Education n.d.-d). The role of parents, family and whanau is identified as supporting their child in learning with key factors being the parent having easily understood, ‘quality’ information about their child’s learning, supporting their child through opportunities to discuss learning that has taken place at school and giving further practice to consolidate learning (Ministry of Education n.d.-d).

A learning focussed approach to partnership would seem to be the most useful in terms of the potential to improve student learning outcomes and if there is to be a genuine partnership between stakeholders then parents need confidence that they are receiving honest and accurate information about their child’s achievement and progress. In explaining the importance of effective gathering and use of assessment information in the reporting process the Ministry of Education (n.d.-d) states that, carried out correctly “*achievement will increase parents and whanau will know how their children are doing and will have the confidence to support them and their learning*” (para. 3). This is however an optimistic position. To state that achievement ‘will’ increase and parents ‘will’ be more able to support their children ignores many complicating elements. Any improvements in student learning outcomes might not just be attributable to the involvement of the child’s parents. Multiple factors affect student achievement and learning outcomes and the challenge of identifying which factor has led to improvement is great (Bull, Brooking, & Campbell, 2008). Conclusive proof of the impact of parent/school partnerships may be difficult to find (Brooking, 2007). The diversity of parental ability and available time to support their child has also been ignored. Parents have differing backgrounds and differing resources with which to support their child’s learning (Biddulph et al., 2003). To suggest that a ‘strong partnership’, supported by the provision of clear, accurate information, ‘will’

result in improved learning outcomes is an overly positive perspective which ignores the complexity of the education process.

How to help

In mid 2009 the Ministry of Education conducted a programme of consultation with parents about the draft National Standards and reporting, seeking their views. A theme that emerged from this consultation was parents' need for guidance so they were able to support their child's learning (Ministry of Education, 2009d). The Ministry have suggested reports should indicate a child's next learning steps and ways parents can support learning (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d). Numerous parent suggestions were reported from the consultation including provision of ideas for activities to carry out at home, the sending home of resources and the provision of 'information packs' (Ministry of Education, 2009d). Whilst some of these ideas may be impractical for schools to implement this consultation has highlighted a legitimate parental concern. Unless the information provided in the report about how to help at home is clear and parents have adequate knowledge and the necessary resources to implement the suggestion then there seems little purpose in identifying how parents can help at home.

Written Reporting: National Standards

In New Zealand the statutory information to be included in written reports to parents is outlined in NAG2a (Ministry of Education, 2010b):

- reporting must be in relation to the child's progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards;
- it must be in writing, twice a year;
- it must be written in plain language (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

The Ministry of Education has provided guidelines for schools about how to meet these requirements, giving greater detail about key elements that should be included in the written report in the "What should be in a report" section of the TKI website (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d). It is stated that written reports should include:

Literature review

- What has been learnt including the student's progress and achievement in relation to the National Standards;
- The next learning steps for the child;
- Ways that the parent can support their child's learning.

Whilst the primary focus of the information reported should be regarding the child's progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to the National Standards, it is also stated that information regarding achievement in other curriculum areas can be included as can information about the Key Competencies (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d).

Further guidance has been given by the Ministry of Education through the provision of a variety of reporting templates (Ministry of Education, 2012b). These provide a range of formats for schools to use or adapt to suit their needs. There are simple box templates which allow recording of narrative comments, for example the "National Standards Only Interim Report". At the other extreme there are complex multi-year reports such as the "Cross Curriculum Progress from Year 1-6" report which include grids for recording assessment and achievement information over time and a number of boxes for recording narrative comments relating to progress, next learning steps and ways to support children at home. This latter report also includes brief reference to "Wider Curriculum Achievement" in the form of small space to record a level and another to record a judgement relating to attitude/effort (Ministry of Education, 2012b). Each format uses different devices to deliver the required information and it is for schools to determine which is most suited to the needs of their community. Schools are also free to devise their own formats if they wish.

Further support has been provided for schools through a resource developed by The Practitioners Reporting Group (2011) which includes self review tools for schools to use to examine their reporting practices along with examples of reporting formats. With such a wealth of support material available it might be easy to conclude that producing an effective written report is now a straightforward endeavour. But challenges remain in producing a clear, honest and accurate report in a format that is easily understood by parents.

Format of reports: Representations of Achievement

During the consultation period on National Standards meetings were held with parents to discuss the Standards and associated reporting practices. Feedback was provided by parents during this period on the Ministry's sample reports which included snapshot and 'over time' graphs. Issues such as clarity of the format arose along with comments being made about the type of information that should be included and how easy this was to understand. Parents were also concerned about the level of detail in reports and the timing of reports (Ministry of Education, 2009d). This consultation occurred prior to the introduction of the National Standards and revised reporting processes. The extent to which parents are finding reports clear and easy to understand is yet to be determined although a report commissioned by the Ministry of Education which included an evaluation of written school reports identified that a significant number of the reports (21%) did not mention the National Standards, whilst many others were either unclear or did not give enough information about the child's progress and achievement in relation to National Standards (Thomas & Ward, 2011). Thomas and Ward did not address parents' perceptions of the reports but included their own evaluation of the content and clarity of reporting formats. It is unlikely that parental perceptions would be the same as those of experienced professionals and so it is difficult to see how any firm conclusions about the clarity of the reports for parents can be drawn.

Many of the report templates suggested by the Ministry of Education include some form of narrative or comment (Ministry of Education, n.d.-h). Ensuring that comments contain personal and accurate representations of progress and achievement is important if parents are to view these as relevant. Studies from the United States and England have highlighted the difficulties teachers can face when attempting to use predetermined comments to describe student performance (Tuten, 2007) and the concern from parents that can ensue when schools use prepared banks of comments or computerised reporting systems (Power & Clark, 2000). In addition research has highlighted the difficulties that parents can have in understanding the comments made by teachers particularly where the language used is complex and confusing (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 2002). The importance of communicating using plain language cannot be overstated if parents

are to be able to understand and interpret the comments on their child's written report.

It is suggested that assessment information that can indicate a child's progress and achievement be included in written reports (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d). Whilst parents have given feedback suggesting that they would like to receive information about their child's progress and achievement, they also identified that they would like information about assessment tools used and the curriculum levels identified (Ministry of Education, 2009d). This would be vital for parents if teachers were to include detailed assessment information such as stanines from testing, such as Progressive Achievement Tests (PATs), numeracy strategy stage or even a National Curriculum level. There may also be statements like at/below/above the expected level. This raises the problem of how to ensure that parents can understand any levels or grades that are included on the written report. The child's achievement or progress may be reported in different ways including graphs, diagrams, charts, codes or levels (Marino et al., 2001; Power & Clark, 2000). Unless these are carefully explained and the standards towards which they are intended to show achievement and progress are also explained, parents may have only limited understanding of what this means for their child.

The situation is even more complex when grades for effort or attitude are included on the report (Ministry of Education, n.d.-h). Reporting a child's attitude or effort is of interest to parents but its communication through grades can lead to confusion in parents' minds. With potentially multiple types of grade (e.g. A-E, 1-5) displayed on one page parents may struggle to correctly interpret each of them (Friedman & Frisbie, 1995) and parental understanding may be compromised. In a study of parental understanding of report cards carried out in the United States (Waltman & Frisbie, 1994) it was stated that

for grades to serve as an effective means of communicating school progress to a child's parents, both parents and teachers must have a clear and consistent understanding of what the grade represents. The results of this study overwhelmingly indicate that this communication is muddled. (p.235).

Unless careful explanation is provided about the meaning of grades and/or levels there is the possibility for misinterpretation and misunderstanding. This has been borne out by research which has identified that parents have found it difficult to interpret assessed levels and were unclear about the criteria for assessment that had been used (Crosby & Kim, 2006). Another study from England (Walker, 1998) identified one of the motivations for parents to attend reporting evenings was to get help to “*decode the often cryptic information given on written reports*” (p.173).

Making judgements about student achievement: overall teacher judgements (OTJs)

In order to report to parents on a child’s level of achievement in relation to national standards teachers are required to make an Overall Teacher Judgement (OTJ). According to the Ministry of Education (n.d.-g) this involves teachers “drawing on and applying the evidence gathered up to a particular point in time in order to make an overall judgement about a student’s progress and achievement” (Ministry of Education, n.d.-g) As part of this process they need to make reliable, defensible qualitative judgements about their students’ work. Their ability to provide accurate information regarding student achievement to parents will depend upon their skill in this area.

Teachers gather evidence of student learning and achievement over a period of time and use these ‘multiple sources of evidence’ to arrive at a decision regarding achievement in relation to the verbal descriptor representing ‘the standard’. (Ministry of Education, 2009b, 2009c). This achievement information in relation to NS is then reported to parents.

Issues in using the standards and making OTJs.

It is claimed that the National Standards statements (verbal descriptors) will help teachers when making judgements about student achievement. However, concern has been raised that the fuzzy wording and broad nature of the statements such as:

By the end of year 5, students will create texts in order to meet the writing demands of the New Zealand Curriculum as they work towards level 3.

Students will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information to meet specific learning purposes across the curriculum. (Ministry of Education, 2009d)

makes it challenging for teachers to assess whether or not a student has met the standard (Elley, 2010; Thrupp et al., 2009). In addition there is little differentiation between standards at the various year levels (Elley, 2010). For example, in the fold out section of the Reading and Writing Standards for Years 1 – 8 (2009) it is stated that:

After one year at school, students will create texts as they learn in a range of contexts across the New Zealand Curriculum within level 1. Students will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information to meet specific learning purposes across the curriculum.

However, the next standards statement says that:

After two years at school, students will create texts in order to meet the writing demands of the New Zealand Curriculum at level 1. Students will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information to meet specific learning purposes across the curriculum.

Significant parts of both statements are the same and so do not provide information for teachers or parents regarding the differing expectations for each year level. Where there are differences in wording it is unclear how teachers should interpret the statements. Furthermore, any differences between working “*within level 1*” and “*working at level 1*” are not made explicit and need far greater clarification if they are to be used consistently and effectively by teachers.

Whilst copious support materials are available to teachers, Australian studies have shown that far from being helpful to teachers when making judgements, too many resources can lead to teachers using the documents inconsistently (Wyatt-Smith, Klenowski, & Gunn, 2010), ignoring the standards or even using their own ideas

rather than what is published about what is important in students' work (Wyatt-Smith & Castleton, 2005).

The lack of clarity in the language of the standards extends to the language of reporting student achievement. Teachers are required to decide if a student is 'at', 'above', 'below' or 'well below' the nationally referenced standard for their year level. Schools have flexibility in how this information is conveyed to parents but are required to use the specific terms 'at', 'above', 'below' or 'well below' when reporting for the Board of Trustees annual report (Ministry of Education, n.d.-c). This is problematic because what constitutes the exact level of achievement needed for a student to be deemed to have met, not met or be exceeding the standard is not clearly stated (Flockton, 2010). It is hard to see how teachers and schools can make consistent, defensible judgements in these circumstances.

Further issues arise from assumptions underlying the structure of the standards where a linear progression in student learning is presented. There is however little evidence to support this notion of progression (Flockton, 2010) particularly in an area such as writing (Marshall, 2004). The variety of assessment tools available for schools to use also creates difficulties in ensuring consistency of judgements. As schools select from a range of tools and also include evidence from, for example, teacher observation, it is difficult to see how the results of these assessments can be seen as comparable and/or consistent across schools. Results will not be able to be compared with any degree of reliability (Elley, 2010). Whilst some of these assessment tools may be 'aligned' to the National Standards (Ministry of Education, 2012a) these are not precise alignments and teachers are required to refer to multiple sources of evidence to ensure the validity of their judgements (Ministry of Education, 2012a).

The difficulties experienced by teachers in making sound, reliable OTJs have been highlighted by Poskitt and Mitchell (2012) in a recent New Zealand study of teachers' understandings of OTJs. In discussing the potential of National Standards to improve learning outcomes and quality of teaching and assessment they state that "*such ideals are challenging to achieve when teachers are surrounded by uncertainty and confusion about the meaning of, and process for deriving, OTJs*" (p.72). This issue has also been highlighted by Thrupp, Hattie,

Flockton and Crooks (2009) who state that the standards statements are “*not sufficient ...to allow them to be applied consistently*” (p.2).

Rigorous moderation processes need to be put in place to ensure that consistent, sound judgements are being made (Ministry of Education, n.d.-e). Guidance on how to develop and implement moderation is available on the Ministry of Education’s Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website (Ministry of Education, n.d.-f). In light of a study carried out by Hipkins and Hodgen (2011) into New Zealand teachers’ experiences of moderation in the early stages of introduction of the National Standards, it would appear that guidance is necessary. Many teachers surveyed had limited experience of moderation against a benchmark (Hipkins & Hodgen, 2011). However, the approaches to moderation suggested by the Ministry of Education on the TKI site have been criticised as being optimistic in so far as the known complexities and challenges posed by moderation are largely ignored (Elley, 2010). The Ministry’s belief that the moderation processes will make reliability of judgements more likely is criticised as naive (Flockton, 2010).

Many have discussed the importance of the moderation process (Ecclestone, 2001; Grainger, Purnell, & Zipf, 2007; Hawe, 2002; Shay, 2005). Moderation can provide opportunities for the development of shared understandings (Shay, 2005) through professional dialogue. This is important for both the inexperienced assessor who will need to be ‘socialised’ into the moderation process (Shay, 2005) and also for more experienced assessors who are often likely to rely on intuition to make judgements and may believe these judgements to be accurate (Ecclestone, 2001). If teachers have the opportunity to reflect on their judgements within the context of the wider teaching community then it becomes more likely that valid judgements about the quality of student work will be made.

Parental Understanding of Written Reports

Historically there has been limited exploration of either the views of parents about the reporting process (Olhausen, Powell, & Reitz, 1994) or of parental understanding of their child’s achievements and progress as conveyed through written school reports. (Hattie & Peddie, 2003). Indeed, whilst the often stated

aims of reporting to parents are to inform them of what they need to know about their child's learning and to engage them in a dialogue with the school, studies have shown this is far from the reality.

Evidence shows that parents often feel confused and unclear about exactly what reports are telling them and do not always feel well informed (Power & Clark, 2000). Issues around parents' ability to effectively interpret information presented in reports have also been highlighted (Hattie, 2010; Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Timperley & Robinson, 2004). This would suggest that there is as yet much to be done to ensure that parents are fully informed about their child's learning.

Some insight into parental understanding of their child's written report has been gained through research into school reporting procedures (e.g. Crosby & Kim, 2006), government commissioned studies and reports (e.g. Ministry of Education, 2009a; Reporting to Parents Taskforce, 2006) and parent authored papers (e.g. Courtney, 2010b). Each offers information about the parental perspective on written reporting and provides a good starting point for examination of the available evidence about what parents feel would make written reports understandable. What do they feel is important? What aspects of written reports do they find give them useful information and how do they feel schools can develop their practice further to support the parent/teacher partnership?

Honest reporting based on accurate information

Writing honest reports is fundamental to the whole notion of reporting. It is essential that communication is open and teachers do not seek to conceal the reality of, for instance, a lack of achievement or unfavourable results. If a genuine partnership is to develop between parent and teacher it is important there is a high degree of trust between both partners and that a full and frank picture of the child's learning and progress is shared, not merely edited highlights. During recent National Standards consultation with parents, families and whanau (Ministry of Education 2009a), honest reporting was one of the more significant issues identified by parents. This notion of providing a truthful report about a student's progress and achievement creates challenges for teachers and schools particularly in how to share information they feel parents will find uncomfortable.

While schools express a desire to report honestly and constructively to parents they often fall short of the mark (Marino et al., 2001; Timperley & Robinson, 2004). Studies have found teachers want to protect parents and students from perceived adverse consequences of negative comments. This can result in overly positive reports being written with little or no reference to areas of development for the child (Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Robinson & Timperley, 2000). Teachers attempt to ‘shield’ parents, family and whanau from the emotional distress and possible anger that a negative comment might cause (Robinson & Timperley, 2000). There is also a concern that, without positive comment, student confidence and self esteem might be impacted and this then might reduce the child’s motivation to learn (Robinson & Timperley, 2000; Thomas, Lai, Robinson, Agbede, & Pythian, 2003). Schools have also expressed concern about student safety following an unsatisfactory report (Thomas et al., 2003; Timperley & Robinson, 2002b). In such circumstances teachers find themselves writing student reports that are not a strictly honest reflection of the child’s achievement and progress but rather the “sugar-coated” type of report referred to in the National Party information about National Standards. Teacher comments about low achievement are often written in a positive manner using supportive language (Thomas et al., 2003). Alternatively information about low achievement or lack of progress may be conveyed to parents but the message made easier to accept by the inclusion of a positive qualifying comment (Marino et al., 2001). The result is that parents receive mixed messages about their child’s achievement and progress. They may well feel uncertain about which elements of the report contain trustworthy information.

Another strategy that is often used by teachers when reporting low achievement and/or lack of progress is to focus comments on student effort. In a study of written school reports carried out as part of an evaluation of the “Assessment for Better Learning” programme, Hattie and Peddie (2003) note that “*as we slide down the scale of performance, the tendency is to report information about effort and avoid the realities of achievement*” (p.9). They also note when teachers make comments about achievement, these tend to be about high achievement with an avoidance of comments about low achievement (Hattie & Peddie, 2003). Low

student achievement is, then, concealed from parents thus affecting their ability to provide necessary support for their child.

It has also been suggested that the desire to be positive when reporting may be a part of a school's culture (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). While well intentioned, it is misguided. The omission of important information about student achievement and progress can lead parents and students to believe that the child is achieving satisfactorily or even highly. Timperley and Robinson (2002) discuss the impact that this can have on improving student learning outcomes. If parents are not aware that there is a 'gap' between their child's achievement level and the standard expected for their age or level of schooling, then they will also not be aware of any need to improve the child's learning outcomes (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). In such circumstances, parents will be unaware of the student's next learning steps and how they can help their child to improve their learning outcomes.

Some reports and studies have noted that parents wish to have specific, accurate, reliable information about their child's achievement and progress. These views have been noted in the 'Feedback: Parents, family, whanau' document (Ministry of Education, 2009a). It is suggested that provision of honest and accurate information about a child's progress and achievement contributes to the development of an effective partnership between school and home that can enable improved student learning outcomes (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d).

Points of reference

The National Standards have been expressed as verbal descriptors whose clarity depends entirely on the language that has been used to codify them. Verbal descriptors, which contain criteria and standards, are stable reference points to which teachers can refer when making a judgement about student progress and achievement (Sadler, 1987). Standards are described by Sadler (1987) as

a definite level of excellence or attainment or a definite degree of any quality viewed as a prescribed object of endeavour or as the recognised measure of what is adequate for some purpose, so established by authority, custom or consensus (p.194).

An example of the standards statements from the Mathematics Standards for years 1-8 (Ministry of Education 2009c) states that *“By the end of year 3, students will be achieving at early level 2 in the mathematics and statistics learning area of the New Zealand Curriculum.”* (p.23). The meaning of the statements is elaborated through further descriptors which state that, for example *“In contexts that require them to solve problems or model situations, students will be able to: apply basic addition facts and knowledge of place value and symmetry to.....combine or partition whole numbers, find fractions of sets, shapes and quantities”* (p.23). The ‘fuzzy’ nature of the standards statements makes them challenging for teachers to use when attempting to make sound qualitative judgements about student work. If teachers find them hard to work with despite professional expertise and training, it is difficult to see how parents can have a clear understanding of the Standards and consequently their child’s report without significantly more input from either schools or information supplied by the Ministry.

In addition to verbal descriptors, standards of performance may be represented through numerical, level or grade-related points of reference such as stanines, reading ages or levels (e.g. Reading age: 6 years 2 months or Reading level: Gold 1) , curriculum levels (e.g. Mathematics level: 2b or Numeracy stage: 4) or an A-E grade (e.g. Science achievement: B).

Points of reference used by teachers when reporting to parents can relate to nationally determined standards, standards that have been set by a school, standards held by the teacher as being appropriate for the relevant age range being taught or even based on comparison of the child’s own previous performance. Explicit explanation to parents regarding the point of reference or standard being used to make judgements is important if parents are to fully understand the meaning of the information being conveyed to them. Without specific identification of the nature of the standard and the point of reference that has been used, parents are unlikely to have enough information to extract the salient points (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a).

Serious difficulties can arise regarding parental understanding of their child’s report if the points of reference being used for assessment have not been made explicit to parents. Descriptors and grades are often used by schools when

reporting student achievement. These may take the form of statements such as “excellent” or “very good” as was the case in reporting processes used at Nga Iwi School in Auckland, whose reporting process was the subject of research during a study of reporting practices in Auckland primary schools (Marino et al., 2001). The challenge faced by parents in understanding their child’s school report became clear when it was identified that the reports did not actually specify whether the descriptors referred to national, school, class or individual standards. In fact, many parents believed that achievement was being reported in relation to a national standard. This was an issue of concern for the Principal who believed that “*many parents did not realise that the achievement profile of children at Nga Iwi did not reflect national profiles*” (p.31). Whilst it might be hoped that this would be an isolated situation other research has identified similar issues (Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). Timperley and Robinson (2002) identified that some schools did not make reference to standards at all when reporting. In addition the point of reference being used might vary within a single report. The point of reference used for reading could be a level expressed as a reading age or for junior children, as a level of the ‘Colour Wheel’ grading system used in the Ready to Read instructional reading series. The same report might include a mathematics level expressed as a National Curriculum level and/or a Numeracy stage.

The lack of clarity regarding points of reference being used could lead to incorrect assumptions being made by parents. If a child’s performance is described as “very good” and the parent believes that this is in relation to a national standard it is reasonable to believe that the child is achieving well. However, if this only relates to a class standard then the child’s actual achievement may be considerably lower. In this situation parents would receive a distorted picture of their children’s achievement leading them to believe that their achievement was higher than was actually the case. It is therefore important that the point of reference being used for assessment and reporting of achievement is clearly stated in order that parents can fully understand the information on their child’s report.

Clear language

Clearly written reports lie at the heart of the process of reporting to parents. The Reporting to Parents Task Force (Reporting to Parents Taskforce, 2006) states that “*good reports are clear reports and clear reports need clear language*” (p.16). It is strongly recommended in the wording of NAG2a that the required twice yearly written report on children’s progress and achievement use ‘plain language’ (Ministry of Education, 2010b)

Claims have been made regarding the benefits of reporting in plain language such as the capacity to build partnerships between home and school and to facilitate parental understanding of the written report which, it is suggested, will in turn lead to greater parental confidence when discussing their child’s progress and achievement at school (Ministry of Education, 2010c). It would appear to be reasonable then, that schools report to parents in plain, clearly understandable language. But closer exploration of this issue reveals a number of challenges.

Firstly, exactly what constitutes ‘plain language’ can be difficult to determine. The Ministry of Education suggests that schools should decide in the context of consultation of their community (Ministry of Education, 2010c). This would appear to be underpinned by an assumption that a school community is a homogenous entity that will share similar ideas about what constitutes ‘plain language’. A school community comprises many diverse individuals and groups with different backgrounds, experiences and abilities. Being able to develop common understandings of the language of reporting would be very challenging.

A further complicating factor in the use of plain language is the dilemma for teachers who are charged with the responsibilities of writing these reports. They are attempting to deal with a range of sometimes competing pressures and requirements placed upon them by different stakeholders in the process. Individual schools will have their own policies, conventions and procedures relating to written reports to parents. The competing demands of constructing reports that meet these various requirements whilst maintaining a professional tone and ensuring that they are easily understandable can create a significant difficulty for teachers. In a study of reporting practices in England, Power and Clarke (2000) note that a significant factor may be the differing roles of parents

and teachers in the education process. This will in turn affect their views regarding what should be included in a school report and the type of language that should be used (Thomas et al., 2003).

It can sometimes be presumed by schools and teachers that the language used within reports is clear simply because they are so familiar with the professional language used. The terminology is a part of their everyday work and familiarity with the language is essential for their ability to function within the teaching profession. A study of teacher professional development in reporting to parents in Australia by O'Donoghue & Dimmock (2001), noted the "high fog rating" that is frequently a feature of the language teachers use when writing report cards. Other research supports this view (e.g. Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Marino et al., 2001; Olhausen et al., 1994). For teachers, many of whom may have had limited specific training in how to write reports (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 2002; Olhausen et al., 1994) being able to write clear school reports may be a difficult exercise (O'Donoghue & Dimmock, 2002).

It can be seen then that the reality for parents trying to understand their child's school report might be challenging. They will be unfamiliar with the full meanings of many terms used but may build up some understanding as they are exposed to the education system over time. This can mean that key points about their child's achievement and progress could be missed. It is likely to be even more apparent when the parents' first language is not English (Crosby & Kim, 2006; Marino et al., 2001). Even if the parent is able to literally understand the words of the report this may be insufficient for them to be able to interpret the information (Crosby & Kim, 2006). The importance of correct interpretation of the information that parents are presented with about their child's achievement and progress is also identified by Hattie and Peddie (2003) as key to parents being able to grasp the full meaning of their child's report.

Parents may be presented with a large amount of significant information about their child's progress and achievement that they do not fully understand. Without a clear understanding of this information it is difficult to see how a fully developed partnership can exist between parent and school. This notion of partnership is one that all claim to value as it can be a means of promoting

improved student achievement (Robinson & Timperley, 2000). Yet this will be unlikely to happen if the language used in the reporting process is inaccessible to parents.

Timing of reports

Another issue raised by parents has been the timing of written reports (Power & Clark, 2000). Power and Clark (2000) highlight the varied nature of schools' reporting cycles which, in the cases they refer to, led to dramatic differences in both the number and timing of written reports that schools provided.

A student's report may provide substantial clear and relevant information and may identify the next steps in learning and how the parent can support this. This information may be perceived by parents as useful, however, if the school reporting cycle provides for a single, annual report at the end of the school year, the information comes late to parents' attention. Parents are then left with little opportunity to support their child by implementing any suggestions about how to help at home. It also means that issues identified may not be appropriately addressed within that school year. Feedback from New Zealand parents about written reporting has also highlighted their wish to receive "regular feedback" to ensure that they are aware of any problems their child may be having so that they can be addressed at the earliest opportunity (Ministry of Education, 2009a)

The issue of timing of reports has, in some measure, been addressed by the new reporting requirements for schools outlined in NAG2a (Ministry of Education, 2010b). Schools are now required to report twice yearly in writing about students' progress in relation to the National Standards in reading, writing and maths. In theory this should provide parents with regular updates about their child's learning. However the requirements outlined in NAG2a do not further specify exact timings of reporting leaving the detail to be addressed by individual schools. Whilst it might be hoped and even presumed that schools will establish patterns of reporting that will enable regular feedback, as there is flexibility this could lead to issues.

Firstly, there will be administrative pressures caused by the general, ongoing work of the school that may impact on the structure of a reporting cycle put in place by

a school. This could include such things as timing of assessments or other, unrelated school events such as cross country or athletics day. Whilst these might not, at first glance appear to have any bearing upon the reporting cycle they do, nonetheless, generate work for staff which must be taken into account by school managers when establishing patterns of reporting.

There are further issues for schools to address which have been created by the broader system of national standards implementation. In particular, difficulties arise for schools when considering how to report student progress and achievement to parents of children in the junior school years of Primary education when progress and achievement are measured and reported in relation to benchmarks that coincide with a child's time at school, not necessarily the middle or end of the school year.

When establishing reporting patterns schools are free to organise this to suit their own particular school and community requirements provided that the requirements outlined in NAG2a regarding frequency of reporting are met (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d). It is suggested that in order for schools to meet this obligation and report "meaningfully", teachers will need to make judgements in relation to the student's progress towards the national standard and

report to parents during the time the student is working towards the expected standard as well as towards the end of the period of time (years 1-3) / class level (years 4-8) covered by the expected standard. To report in writing at least twice a year, teachers will need to make at least one interim as well as a final judgment. (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d).

The timing of reports raises several issues that could impact on parents' ability to fully understand and act on the information in their child's report.

Understanding the Standards

The Ministry of Education's National Standards consultation meetings also indicated that parents have many questions about the National Standards. Parents wished to know more about exactly what the standards are, how they have been arrived at and even wished to have a version in language that would be more

readily understood by parents as they understood that the documents as they stand are intended for a professional audience (Ministry of Education, 2009d). Without an understanding of the expected levels and explanation of terms used parents will find it challenging to understand and interpret their child's report.

Other more probing questions raised included whether the standards were set at an appropriate level and if they would be consistently applied (Ministry of Education, 2009d). Hattie (2010) raises questions about the standards' "*quality and dependability*" (p.8) also noting that the Standards were written by a small group of people and had not been subject to serious outside scrutiny or comment (Hattie, 2010; Thrupp & Easter, 2012). This raises the question of to what extent the standards are indeed set at appropriate levels or whether they are merely the estimations of a few educators (Flockton, 2010).

Research Study and Questions

The literature suggests that producing clear, honest and accurate reports that parents can understand is a complex process and that, until now, written reports have often been confusing for parents and challenging for them to understand (Crosby & Kim, 2006; Hattie & Peddie, 2003; Marino et al., 2001; Power & Clark, 2000). It is as yet unclear whether parental understanding of their child's written report has significantly improved as a result of the revised reporting practices. In light of the literature explored earlier it would seem unlikely at this stage that parents are finding written school reports as informative as suggested by the Ministry of Education.

The current study focuses on exploring the understandings parents have about their child's progress and achievement as conveyed to them by a written school report. Hattie and Peddie (2003) noted the paucity of information about parental understanding of school reports. Investigations into reporting practices have been undertaken in New Zealand (Marino et al., 2001; Timperley & Robinson, 2004) but these were focussed on schools in the geographical area of South Auckland in the late 1990s. The body of literature is rather small and the studies described took place some time ago, prior to the introduction of National Standards.

Literature review

This study contributes to the existing yet small body of knowledge about parental understanding of written school reports. It also provides some evidence about whether National Standards are delivering parental understanding of school reports as promised by government rhetoric.

The following questions are the main focus of the research:

How is student progress and achievement communicated to parents in a formal written report?

What understandings do parents have regarding their child's achievement and progress as communicated to them through formal, written school reports?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the study and the rationale for decisions made regarding research design and execution. The first section considers the framework for inquiry. The second section outlines how participants were selected. The third section discusses ethical principles and explains how issues were addressed while the fourth and fifth sections detail how data were collected and analysed. The final section addresses the plausibility and trustworthiness of the process, findings and conclusions.

Inquiry Framework

School reports contain a large amount of information including such details as a child's academic achievement and progress and their social development. The focus of this research project was parental understanding of their child's written school report. In particular the project focussed on the key questions:

How is student progress and achievement communicated to parents in a formal written report?

What understandings do parents have regarding their child's achievement and progress as communicated to them through formal, written school reports?

The questions guiding this study sought to explore the subjective understandings of individuals and as a result, the most appropriate framework is an interpretive one.

An interpretive framework “takes everyday experience and ordinary life as its subject-matter and asks how meaning is constructed and social interaction negotiated in social practices” (Scott & Usher, 1999, p.25). Within the context of this study the researcher was interested in the meanings and understandings parents derive from their child's report. Individuals' experiences and understandings of the world in which they live are inherently subjective (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Through interviews with parents the researcher

hoped to understand the meanings parents have ascribed to the information presented to them in their child's report and to uncover their understanding of it.

Qualitative approaches to research refer to "*the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things*" (Berg, 2004, p.3). The focus on meaning and description was particularly suited to the investigation of a question based on finding out the understandings of participants.

Participant Sampling and Selection

Selection of participants is a fundamental part of the research process. Clearly decisions have to be made about who will be approached to participate as it would not be possible for a researcher to engage with the entire population of potential participants when gathering data. Therefore a sample of the overall population has to be identified for study (Denscombe, 2003).

The broad strategy used within this study was non-probability sampling. A key feature of this strategy is the deliberate selection of the sample for study (Denscombe, 2003). The sample is drawn from an identified, specific population which "*does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself*" (Cohen et al, 2000, p.102). The appeal of this approach to the small scale researcher is that it provides a more straightforward means of identifying a sample than the more complex approach, probability sampling (Cohen et al., 2000). In addition, non-probability sampling is an appropriate strategy to use as it fits into an interpretive framework and qualitative approach which seeks to provide a rich description of the phenomena under investigation.

Within the context of non-probability sampling a range of specific strategies are identified in the literature including purposive sampling, convenience sampling, snowball sampling (Cohen et al., 2000; Denscombe, 2003), quota sampling, dimensional sampling (Cohen et al., 2000) and theoretical sampling (Denscombe, 2003). The strategy initially used by the researcher to identify participants was purposive sampling where "*participants are selected with a specific purpose in mind, and that purpose reflects the particular qualities of the people or events chosen and their relevance to the topic of the investigation*" (Denscombe, 2003, p.15).

Methodology

The participants required for the current study were parents of primary school age children. There were two steps necessary to gain access to possible participants. Firstly, it was necessary to recruit schools that would be willing to allow access to their parent community. Secondly, parent volunteers needed to be sought.

Schools were purposively selected using the following criteria:

- full or contributing co-educational state primary schools were sought as they contain students of the appropriate age range;
- schools located in the geographical area of Auckland City were sought as they would provide ease of access for the researcher.

Schools meeting these criteria were located by using the ‘search’ facility on the Te Kete Ipurangi (TKI) website. This search identified 94 potential schools. One school was excluded as the researcher had a prior relationship with the school. The remaining 93 schools were sorted into broad groupings according to decile rating (decile 1-3, decile 4-7, decile 8-10). Decile rating is a means of grouping schools according to the proportion of children in each school from “low socio-economic” backgrounds (Ministry of Education, 2011). Whilst this is not an indicator of specific numbers of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in each school it gives a broad categorisation that is then used for determination of particular levels of funding (Ministry of Education, 2011). A number of factors are taken into consideration when determining decile rating in addition to income. These include occupation and educational qualifications. For the purposes of this study the researcher sought to ensure representation from across the spectrum, hence the grouping of schools according to deciles. This approach could not guarantee participant diversity as no further criteria were applied. It did however provide a non intrusive means of increasing the likelihood of maximising participant diversity.

Plan for gaining access to schools

Each of the Principals at the selected schools was sent a letter introducing the researcher and the study (Appendix A) and an accompanying Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B). Responses were to be sorted according to the aforementioned broad decile groups with one school randomly selected from each

grouping. Principals of the selected schools would then be contacted to confirm selection and sent a Consent Form (Appendix C) to enable the researcher to access the school site. The researcher undertook to provide an advertisement (Appendix D) for distribution to parents in the focus year groups, placement on the school website and/or in the school newsletter.

Process for selection of parent participants

The advertisement asked parents who were interested in participating in the research to contact the researcher by telephone or email. Once interest in participating was indicated a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E), Parent Consent Form (Appendix F), Student Participant Information Sheet (Appendix G) and Student Assent Form (Appendix H) was to be sent to potential participants.

Implementation of access and selection

Six schools from each decile group (eighteen in total) were randomly selected for the initial approach. This was done by allocating each a number and then using a random number selection tool from the Internet to select the schools to be approached. Following this first approach to schools only one response (from a decile 2 school) was received. Advertisements were provided to the school for distribution but no parents volunteered to participate. A further eighteen schools were contacted utilising the process outlined above. From the second recruitment round three responses were received (two from decile 10 schools and one from a decile 3 school). Advertisements were provided to these schools for distribution to parents. These two recruitment rounds yielded only one parent volunteer so a third recruitment round was begun. Twelve schools were contacted to seek access to their parent community. No responses were received from these schools.

At this point the researcher was aware that a significant number of the potential schools had been approached to no avail and as a result decided that it was necessary to revise the sampling methods to ensure that sufficient additional participants could be identified within the timeframe for the study.

A fourth, larger sample was then approached (38 schools) whilst, at the same time assistance was sought from the initial parent volunteer to see if snowball sampling

would provide further participants. Through ‘snowballing’ the sample builds up as the research is drawn to the attention of other potential participants through a personal referral process (Denscombe, 2003). Snowball sampling did not however result in any parents coming forward. At the same time a third party circulated information about the study to known parents of primary age children, using a convenience sampling approach.

Convenience sampling uses subjects readily to hand or known by the researcher to obtain a group of participants (Cohen et al., 2000). Citing the work of Stake (1995) Denscombe (2003) suggests that, in the case of similar sample groups existing, the practicalities of ready access by the researcher are a legitimate consideration. However, convenience sampling should be used with caution. The mere proximity of participants or ready access should not be the sole determining criteria regarding inclusion of a subject (Denscombe, 2003). In this study the key criterion used in the selection process was that participants had primary age school children. Whether they received information about the project from their child’s school or from a third party would not impact on this condition being satisfied.

Convenience sampling yielded a further seven parents who volunteered to participate. The fourth recruitment round from schools did result in a further six schools expressing an interest in participating in the study. However, given that eight participants had already been identified the researcher decided to approach only one of these schools, selected at random. The researcher assigned each school a number and selected one by using an Internet based random number generator. Whilst the school did agree to allow access to their parent community no parents expressed interest in participating.

As a result of the convenience sampling approach the seven volunteers who came forward were parents of children in Years 1 – 6. Given the lack of response by parents through approaches to schools (one volunteer from approximately 500 advertisements distributed) the researcher decided to simply utilise the eight existing volunteers.

Ethical Principles

A number of ethical principles that researchers must consider are identified in the literature including the avoidance of harm to or deception of participants, the protection of participants' privacy, confidentiality, the voluntary nature of participation and the need to have the informed consent of those who participate (Berg, 2004; Denscombe, 2003). Steps were taken to ensure that each of these principles was addressed. Schools and parents who expressed an interest in participating were given Participant Information Sheets (PIS) (Appendices B and E) which fully explained their involvement and participation in the study. The Participant Information Sheet provided parents with the researcher's contact information for the purpose of both expressing interest in participation and asking questions about the research. This was reviewed with parents prior to commencement of the interview to check that they were happy to proceed and had no unanswered questions.

The Participant Information Sheets explained to both schools and parent participants that their participation in the research was voluntary. Principals were asked to give an assurance that parents would not be pressured to participate and that their decision to do so or not would not impact upon their or their child's relationships with school staff or their achievement grades.

The principle of participants being fully conversant with what the study entails and their anticipated involvement so that they can give informed consent is a fundamental ethical consideration for researchers (Berg, 2004; Denscombe, 2003). By giving their informed consent those involved in the research indicate that they have had the procedures and potential risks explained to them prior to participation. Ensuring that written consent is gained is also important as "When the consent is in writing it acts as a way of formally recording the agreement to participate and confirming that the participant has been informed about the nature of the research" (Denscombe 2003, p138). Parents and school Principals were asked to sign Consent Forms (Appendices C and F) which re-iterated the main points of the Participant Information Sheet and required each party to sign to confirm their understanding of the information and agreement to participate. In addition, as the students' written school reports were being discussed and copies

given to the researcher as documentary evidence it was important to ensure that the children were informed about the process involved and assented to this information being shared with the researcher. The researcher provided a Student Participant Information Sheet (Appendix G) and Student Assent Form (Appendix H). These were designed using appropriate vocabulary and phrasing that would be readily understood by young children. Participating parents were asked to read the documents with their child, talk to them about the project and, if their child was happy for them to discuss their written school report with the researcher and leave a copy with her, to ask them to sign the Student Assent Form (Appendix H). Students did not have contact with the researcher or any direct involvement in the project.

The Participant Information Sheet also outlined measures that would be taken to maintain confidentiality of participation and anonymity in the reporting of information. Berg (2004) highlights the difficulty in guaranteeing anonymity of participants as their identities are often known to the researcher and as such may be inadvertently disclosed or alluded to when writing the research findings. In this study parent participants, their children and the schools they attended were referred to by pseudonym. This minimised the possibility of participants' identities becoming known. In addition documentary evidence had all names and identifying features removed. A further challenge in maintaining participant anonymity was the small sample of participants. The steps that would be taken to ensure security of the data once gathered were explained to participants in the Participant Information Sheets. These measures included password protection of the researcher's computer, restricted access to documents and their secure storage and eventual destruction upon completion of the project.

Data Collection

The nature of the question being investigated indicated that the best methods of data gathering would be through the dual approaches of interviewing parents and gathering samples of their child's written school report. The pseudonyms of each parent who agreed to the interview are as follows: Emily; Eliza; Carla; Lara; Holly; Jasmine; Melanie and Lily.

Interviews

Interviews have been defined as ‘a conversation with a purpose’ (Kahn & Cannell, 1957; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This might appear to suggest that conducting an in-depth interview is a straightforward matter however, as stated by Berg (2004) the exchange can be complex. Enabling the ‘voice’ of the participant to emerge and careful questioning to ensure that issues perceived as difficult by the participant are not avoided are critical elements of the interview process (Berg, 2004). For the purposes of this study the researcher used audio digital recording to record the interview which was then transcribed to produce a written record. Within this context detailed observation of the participant was also important to enable non-verbal information such as gesture and expression to be noted which could then aid the analysis of interview transcripts (Berg, 2004; Denscombe, 2003). Non-verbal communication occurring at specific points can provide valuable insights for the researcher and can help clarify participants’ intentions and state of mind (Denscombe, 2003). Making brief notes about behaviours observed and contextual factors can enable the researcher to fill in the gaps left by digital recording of an interview which can only capture the spoken word and punctuating silences (Denscombe, 2003). It can be seen that, whilst the notion of purposeful conversation is a useful starting point for considering the nature of interviews, a complex range of skills are required if interviews are to be conducted effectively by the researcher (Berg, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

Interviews are generally categorised in three broad types – structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Berg, 2004; Denscombe, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). During a structured interview the interviewer uses a series of predetermined questions to frame the ‘conversation’. These questions will have been carefully planned to ensure the likelihood that a limited range of responses are elicited and there is little or no scope for deviation from the given questions (Denscombe, 2003). All respondents are asked the same questions and these are usually presented in the same order. In the current study structured interviews were discounted due to the researcher’s experiences in conducting the trial interviews. Participants in the trial interviews brought their own context and subjective meanings to the situation which resulted in a need to ask further questions. Participants did not deal with issues in the same order, and responses

needed probing to elicit more complete and full understandings of their child's written report.

At the other end of the spectrum an unstructured interview involves the researcher introducing the area of interest to which the participant then responds, leading the direction and content of the interview (Denscombe, 2003). In this type of interview the respondent takes the lead and so each participant may choose to take a different path. Different aspects of the area under study may be raised in each interview. The key point of difference between the two interview types is the amount of control that the researcher has over the process and the kinds of answers that may be given (Denscombe, 2003). Situated between these two positions is the semi-structured interview. In the case of semi-structured interviews the researcher will have some broad areas and questions prepared to give a general 'steer' to the conversation but has flexibility in their use. All respondents are asked the same questions but the order may differ and the flow of the conversation may vary. The interviewer is able to respond to participants' thoughts and ideas and often will ask further probing or confirming questions as the interview unfolds. However, over the course of each interview, respondents address the same areas / questions and so there is a greater degree of consistency of information elicited. This enables clearer comparison and analysis to take place.

It was the semi-structured interview that the researcher decided to use in this study as it fits in with an interpretive, qualitative approach (Cohen et al., 2000). A structured interview might limit participant responses when discussing a child's school report, whilst relying on the respondent leading the content and direction of the interview might mean that the researcher does not elicit sufficient relevant and/or comparative information regarding parents' understanding of their child's written school report. The semi-structured interview provided the most effective means of enabling parents to explain their understandings as fully as possible and for the researcher to get information about the same key areas of interest from all participants.

Before commencing the project the proposed interview schedule was trialled by conducting test interviews. The preliminary trial of the interview schedule was

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carried out by interviewing the researcher's spouse and adult son. Both were given a sample student report which they read and then answered the researcher's questions based on the information in the report. Both 'test' participants responded quite differently with one requiring significant further questioning to elicit detailed responses. The researcher then carried out a further trial with a volunteer known to her. This second trial suggested again that the researcher may need to have a range of prepared prompts to support participants during the interview as the researcher needed to ask the 'test' participant further subsidiary questions to elicit full answers. These are identified on the Interview Schedule (Appendix I). The questions included in the final interview schedule were intended to be more open ended (within a specified area) to enable parents to explain their understanding of their child's report with as little constraint as possible.

The eight interviews conducted for the study took place at locations and times convenient for the participants. This included interviewing a parent at school when they dropped their child off, visiting a parent at home and meeting with participants at their workplace by arrangement. In each case, prior to the interview commencing, the researcher reviewed the points on the Consent Form to ensure that the participants were clear about the process, their participation and that they had no further questions to ask before beginning. The researcher also ensured that the Student Assent Form had been discussed with the child and completed. Next the researcher noted some background information about each participant and their child. The interviews ranged between twelve and twenty minutes in length. The interviews were then transcribed.

Documents

As the focus of this research project was parental understanding of their child's written school report it was important for the researcher to gather and analyse such documents in order to develop perspective on the detail of what is reported to parents and subsequently their understandings of the various elements that comprise a school report. In discussing the use of documents by researchers Berg (2004), and Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that they can be an unobtrusive means of gathering data for subsequent review and analysis by the researcher.

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A second function of the use of report documents was to act as a prompt for discussion during the interviews. Parents may have received their child's report some time ago and so their recollection of detail and their ability to fully articulate their understanding might be compromised if relying on memory alone. The document could serve as an aide-memoire during the interview to trigger parental thoughts and comments.

However, the researcher must maintain awareness that firstly, whilst analysis of the documentary evidence is undoubtedly less intrusive than other sources such as an interview, in this instance documents are highly personal and contain information about children's progress and achievement at school. The Participant Information Sheets outlined steps that would be taken by the researcher to ensure that participant confidentiality would be maintained.

It is also important to be aware that the socially constructed nature of documents has an impact on their content and for the researcher to bear this in mind when analysing the information (Denscombe, 2003). The written school report has been constructed by a teacher, within the context of school requirements and constraints with the intended audience being the parent and possibly the child. These influences will have shaped the content of the document and must be considered in any analysis.

All participants provided the researcher with a copy of their child's most recent written school report (see Table 1, p.45).

Data Analysis

Data gathered in a qualitative study is essentially complex, diverse and often word based (Denscombe, 2003). The challenge for the researcher is

to discover the key components or general principles underlying a particular phenomenon so that these can be used to provide a clearer understanding of that thing (Denscombe, 2003, p.119).

With this in mind two overarching approaches to data analysis were used – thematic analysis and content analysis.

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The researcher began by conducting multiple readings of the participant interview transcripts with a different focus each time. In the first reading the researcher identified words and phrases that seemed to be of significance in relation to the question, making notes in the margin (see Appendix J). This open coding was an early way to identify relevant information (Denscombe, 2003). In a subsequent reading the researcher began to look for patterns in the data and overall themes that were beginning to emerge, noting these at key points on the transcripts (see Appendix J). This inductive approach allowed the patterns to emerge from the data rather than imposing predetermined themes upon it (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Whilst the researcher had some initial theories about the types of themes that would arise the researcher was aware of these but did not bring them to the fore during initial analysis so that the data could 'speak for itself'. Following these initial forays, themes from the literature were revisited and relevant codes attached to the transcripts, facilitating a complementary, deductive approach to analysis. Further readings of the interview data enabled the researcher to understand the emerging themes in greater detail with specific words and phrases then identified as being relevant to a given theme. These multiple readings allowed the researcher to be 'immersed' in the data and develop a familiarity with it that would facilitate more effective analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006), as examples of data relating to one theme were compared with other, similar examples. This constant comparative method allowed the researcher to identify overarching themes and begin to confirm initial and developing theories (Denscombe, 2003). Examples of coding are included in Appendix K.

In order to analyse the documentary data (school reports) the researcher used the method of content analysis. This approach to analysis is often viewed as less obtrusive than other methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). It can be carried out away from the research setting and after data have been gathered. It is important to remember however, that these data are still subject to interpretation by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The students' written reports were analysed to identify key types of report content including curriculum areas, points of reference used, information about student progress and achievement, language used and the format of the reports (see Appendix L). This information was then compared in several ways. Firstly the researcher compared the reports with each

other to look for common features and formats. Next the researcher viewed the reports in conjunction with the transcripts of the interviews with parents to investigate whether parents had identified and understood key information presented in the report.

Trustworthiness

The notions of credibility, confirmability, transferability and dependability have been identified as key factors in establishing the trustworthiness of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

The credibility or 'believability' (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) of the findings of a study hinges upon the accuracy with which the researcher has described the setting and whether or not the inferences made are seen as plausible. Within this study the researcher utilised a number of strategies to address the issue and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Firstly, the researcher offered participants the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure that they were happy with their accuracy and to request amendments if they wished. Only one participant took up this offer and she did not request that any changes be made. This type of 'member check' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) increases the likelihood that the study's findings will be a fully accurate representation of participants' views.

A further strategy employed was triangulation of data. Triangulation involves the use of multiple methods of collecting data and using the different data in order to cross check the information (Cohen et al., 2000). Triangulation of interview data, and of interview and document data was used to align and compare perceptions and understandings of information the participants believed they had received in their child's written report.

The researcher also had regular 'peer debriefing' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) sessions with her two academic supervisors. At these meetings the research design, methodology, findings and conclusions of the study were discussed. A rigorous

process of discussion and questioning was undertaken to explain, check and clarify the research process and outcomes.

Confirmability

Confirmability relates to the extent to which the findings and conclusions of the study are viewed as transparent and able to be confirmed by others through review of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In order to be confirmable the findings of the study must be able to be independently justified by analysis of the data. There must be clear links between the data, analyses, inferences drawn and conclusions. The researcher's inferences must be reasonable, defensible if subject to scrutiny and as free from bias as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One means of addressing the issues relating to confirmability is through a clear audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This would allow review of the research material and data. Some research data (interview extracts and documentation) have been included in the appendices of this document thus enabling the reader to understand the research design and methods used.

Transferability

For the findings of a study to be viewed as transferable they must "be useful to others in similar situations, with similar research questions or questions of practice" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p201). In the case of small studies, it is argued that is neither desirable nor possible to make generalisations about the wider population based on a limited set of data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However, by creating a 'thick description' (Denscombe, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the researcher will provide a means for others to determine whether or not findings are transferable or of relevance to their specific context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher has provided a thick description through the use of participant voice in the following chapters.

Dependability

The concept of dependability has been linked to the notion of reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reliability has been seen as "*a synonym for consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and over groups of respondents.*" (Cohen

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et al, 2000, p.117) However, a straightforward replication of results is problematic as circumstances and situations change and differ both within contexts and from one context to the next (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). To ensure the dependability of the study it is vital to provide an explicit chain of evidence that can be followed including information about the various stages of the research, sampling, methods used and types of analysis undertaken. The researcher has outlined processes in this chapter that contribute to establishing dependability as will the descriptions in the following chapter. This is further supported by evidence in the appendices.

The next chapter will explore the written reports that parents received explaining their child's achievement and progress.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS – INFORMATION PROVIDED TO PARENTS

Each parent provided a copy of their child’s most recent written report, giving eight reports in total. In this chapter an in depth analysis of reporting formats is presented. The reasons for undertaking such an analysis were twofold. Firstly it was considered important given that the reporting formats provided by parents differed in regard to structure, content and points of reference used. Second, the complexity of the information provided in each report was seen as a potential factor affecting parents’ understandings of their child’s progress and achievement. This chapter presents the findings of the document analysis and is organised into three main sections: the first section outlines the type and purpose of the report formats; the second section investigates how schools reported reading, writing and mathematics in relation to the National Standards and the third section explains how other information was reported.

Written Reports

In this section the type and purpose of the reporting formats is explained. Detail regarding the nature of information given to parents is also provided.

Timing and Purpose of Written Reports

No two schools had the same format or covered the same content in the same way. Table 1 (p.45) identifies the type of report, timing and statements of purpose in the reports.

The reports were given to parents between May and August and as such all could be termed ‘mid year’ reports. Each report template varied in design and content with few common features.

All schools identified the reporting of achievement and/or progress as a core purpose of their written report. Albatross School stated that:

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This report will provide you with an indication of how your child is progressing. (Albatross School, p.4)

Other schools indicated that their report provided a summary of progress:

This is a summation of ability, attitude and progress, compared to other children of a similar age. (Stork School, p.6)

Table 1

Timing and Purpose of Report

School	Type of Report	Timing	Purpose of Report
Swift School	Mid Year	June	Summary of progress
Albatross School	Mid Year	July	Summary of progress
Mallard School	Mid Year	No date	Summary of progress Comparative performance - national
Stork School	Mid Year	No date	Summary of progress Comparative
Robin School	Mid Year	June	Summary of progress Next learning steps
Magpie School	Mid Year	June	Summary of progress
Pelican School	Mid Year	May	Summary of progress
Sparrow School	Mid Year	No date	Summary of progress Tracking achievement

What was reported

Information about a range of National Curriculum areas was reported by the schools including reading, writing and mathematics (all schools), the arts (six schools), physical education and health (five schools), oral language (three schools), key competencies (three schools), Te Reo (two schools) and ICT (one

school). Four schools also reported on inquiry or topic which encompassed a variety of curriculum areas but the areas included in these categories differed. Sparrow and Mallard Schools gave no information about the curriculum areas covered in their inquiry or unit studies sessions. Magpie and Albatross Schools included social studies, science and technology with Albatross also reporting health under the heading of topic. In addition Stork, Swift and Sparrow Schools reported on religious education.

Reporting Formats

All schools included tables in their reports. These tables were used as a frame for a range of information presented in, for example, codes to represent achievement and progress, or to hold short descriptive comments and longer commentaries. Some schools also included tables containing statistical information about the student's achievement, for example current National Curriculum level achievement (Sparrow School).

Reporting in Reading, Writing and Mathematics: National Standards

One common feature across all reports was the reference made to National Standards when reporting on the three core curriculum areas of reading, writing and mathematics. Seven schools explicitly mentioned the National Standards within their report templates. The remaining school (Mallard School) did use some of the language associated with the National Standards for example, 'expectation' and 'next learning steps', however, no specific mention was made of the National Standards.

Schools signalled a strong emphasis on the National Standards within their curriculum, assessment and reporting processes. Some were clear about this focus from the outset with statements of purpose, a report title or major headings indicating for the parents the significance of the Standards:

All children are currently working towards the National Standards taught through the New Zealand Curriculum. A summary of their progress towards these is provided in this report. (Swift School, p.1)

Report to show progress towards the National Standard
(Magpie School, p.1)

Maths/Reading/Writing Tracking against National Standards.
(Sparrow School)

All schools allocated the greatest proportion of their templates and reporting to reading, writing and mathematics. Six schools structured their templates with these three key areas occupying the most prominent positions ensuring that they were the first subjects listed. Pelican School went further reporting only on these core curriculum areas, with four of five pages of their template devoted to information about them. Similarly Sparrow School used three and a half pages of their five page template to report on these areas.

Whilst all schools reported on progress or achievement in relation to the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics they used a variety of scales and terminology to represent this. Mallard and Pelican Schools used the scaling system “above, at, below, well below” when reporting student achievement but how these phrases were used by the schools was different. In the case of Mallard School these terms were used in conjunction with the word “expectation” to indicate the child’s achievement e.g. above expectation, below expectation. However, what “expectation” referred to was not made explicit. For example, it could relate to age, years or National Curriculum level.

Pelican School indicated current achievement in relation to the Standard by highlighting the relevant term and also predicted student achievement in relation to the National Standards at the end of the year:

At her current rate of progress XXXX is likely to be:

Above – at – below – well below the National Standard at the end of the year. (Pelican School, p.2)

Albatross School used a different scaling system – “below, on track, at or above” stating in their initial explanation that these terms referred to student achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. In the reading, writing and mathematics

sections of the report though it identified the child's progress in relation to expectation.

Other schools indicated only the applicable part of the scale to report progress or achievement. Stork and Swift Schools did not include the whole scale only where the child 'sat'. Stork School, for example, used the phrase "*Working Towards Standard*" and Swift School indicated that, in Chris's case he was "*Working within the National Standard for Reading*".

Magpie School's report focussed on progress towards reaching the Standard with statements such as "*Is making the required progress towards meeting the National Standard*" and "*With accelerated progress could meet the National Standard.*"

In summary, within each school the scales used to report progress or achievement in the three core areas were consistent. If a school used the scale 'above, at, below, well below' to report in reading the same terminology was then used for writing and mathematics. However, between schools significant differences were evident.

Points of Reference Used in Reading

As can be seen from Table 2, a range of points of reference was used to indicate student achievement in reading. All schools referred to at least one point of reference in their reporting of reading and six included multiple points of reference on their reports.

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Table 2

Points of Reference Used When Reporting Progress and Achievement in Reading.

School	Point(s) of Reference
Swift School	National Standard NC Level Instructional Level in Years
Albatross School	National Standard School Expectation
Mallard School	Expectation
Stork School	National Standard Reading age in Years
Robin School	National Standard Expectation Reading level (numerical)
Magpie School	National Standard
Pelican School	National Standard NC Level Ready to Read Colour Wheel Level Reading age in Years
Sparrow School	National Standard NC Level Ready to Read Colour Wheel Level Reading age in Years

Swift, Pelican and Sparrow Schools included New Zealand National Curriculum levels within their reporting. Swift School for instance gave a general ‘expected level’ for the child. Some schools used tables to present information. For example, Pelican School used a table linking time at school with National Curriculum Levels and how these related to the National Standards.

<i>Reading</i>						
	<i>After 1 Yr at school</i>	<i>After 2 Yrs at school</i>	<i>After 3 Yrs at school</i>	<i>End of Year 4</i>	<i>End of Year 5</i>	<i>End of Year 6</i>
<i>Curriculum Level</i>	<i>Early Level 1</i>	<i>Late Level 1</i>	<i>Early Level 2</i>	<i>Late Level 2</i>	<i>Early Level 3</i>	<i>Late Level 3</i>
<i>Working at</i>			<i>Above standard</i>			

(p.2)

Findings – Information Provided to Parents

Sparrow School incorporated the National Curriculum Levels on their “Reading Tracking against National Standards” sheet.

Four schools included a reading age in years in their reports. For example:

Reading Age: 5.5-6. (Stork School, p.3)

9.5 – 10.5 (Sparrow School, Reading Tracking Against National Standards)

Swift School reported the child’s “*Instructional level: 11 – 12.5*”. However, they did not state that this referred to a reading age expressed in years. Robin School included a numerical scale of reading levels (<9 to 27) to report reading achievement. There was no further explanation of the levels.

Reading

<i>Level</i>	<9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
	<i>In February your child was working at</i>																		
<i>February</i>														✓					
	<i>In April your child was working at</i>																		
<i>April</i>															✓				
	<i>In June your child is here</i>																		
<i>June</i>																		✓	

(Robin School p.2)

It can be seen that, in reading, there were great differences between schools in the points of reference used to report student progress and achievement.

Three schools included effort ratings in reading with Magpie and Mallard Schools giving each child a specific rating but not indicating the full rating scale being used whilst Stork School included “*Attitude and effort*” as a category:

Findings – Information Provided to Parents

Extract from Stork School Report

<i>Reading</i>	<i>Consistently</i>	<i>Usually</i>	<i>Developing</i>
<i>Reading Age: 5.5-6.0</i> <i>Working Towards Standard</i>			
<i>Attitude and effort</i>	✓		

Points of Reference Used in Writing

In comparison to reading there was a greater consistency between schools in the points of reference used to report student achievement and/or progress in writing.

Table 3

Points of Reference Used When Reporting Progress and Achievement in Writing

School	Points of Reference
Swift School	National Standard National Curriculum Level Spelling age in Years
Albatross School	National Standard School Expectation
Mallard School	Expectation Spelling age
Stork School	National Curriculum Level National Standard
Robin School	National Curriculum Level National Standard Expectation
Magpie School	National Standard
Pelican School	National Curriculum Level National Standard
Sparrow School	National Standard National Curriculum Level

Findings – Information Provided to Parents

Five schools used National Curriculum Levels as a point of reference in their reporting of writing. However, National Curriculum Levels cover a wide span of achievement and so four schools chose to sub-divide the Levels. The terminology used for these sub-divisions differed. Stork School reported a National Curriculum Level indicating the child’s achievement in writing. In their explanation of the levels on the reverse of the report they stated that the Level would be qualified with a letter attempting to show a more precise level of achievement - “B” indicated “*Beginning*”, “M” represented “*Middle*” and “E” stood for “*End*”. Robin School and Sparrow School adopted a similar three point scale to refine the National Curriculum Level, both opting to use B, P, A to qualify the level of achievement. Neither school provided any explanation of what the letter coding represented.

Pelican School used two different ways of referring to National Curriculum Levels for writing within their report. They again used tables to convey the information. Within the summary and prediction of achievement they used the descriptors “*early*” and “*late*” to qualify the National Curriculum Level.

<i>Writing</i>						
	<i>After 1 Yr at school</i>	<i>After 2 Yrs at school</i>	<i>After 3 Yrs at school</i>	<i>End of Year 4</i>	<i>End of Year 5</i>	<i>End of Year 6</i>
<i>Curriculum Level</i>	<i>Early Level 1</i>	<i>Late Level 1</i>	<i>Early Level 2</i>	<i>Late Level 2</i>	<i>Early Level 3</i>	<i>Late Level 3</i>
<i>Working at</i>			<i>Above standard</i>			

(Pelican School report to Holly)

However, in reporting students’ progress and achievement Pelican School used “*learning progressions*”. Within the table provided details about what each child would be expected to achieve at the identified level. Different terminology was also used.

Pelican School Mid Year Report 2012; Writing

Writing level	National Standard
Level one- <i>children will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas and information for specific learning purposes.</i>	<i>After 1 year at school children are working towards Level 1.</i> <i>After 2 years at school the National Standard for writing is to be a Level 1 writer.</i>
Level Two- <i>children will use their writing to think about, record, and communicate experiences, ideas, and information for specific learning purposes.</i>	<i>After 3 years at school the National Standard for writing is to be working in Level 2.</i> <i>At the end of year 4 the National Standard for writing is to be at Level 2.</i>

The statements in the first column were adaptations of sections of the National Standards statements for the respective year group. The second column included vocabulary seeking to qualify which stage of the National Curriculum Level children at each year level should be at. So, after one year at school the report states that children “*are working **towards Level 1***”, whilst after two years at school they should “***be a Level 1** writer*”. The terminology changed further when describing performance in Years 3 and 4 saying that children should be “***working in Level 2***” and “***writing is to be at Level 2***”.

Points of Reference Used in Mathematics

When reporting achievement and progress in mathematics, schools were again relatively consistent in the points of reference used. Table 4 shows the range of points of reference that schools included in their reporting of mathematics with the National Standard and National Curriculum Level being the most frequently referred to.

Table 4

Points of Reference Used When Reporting Progress and Achievement in Mathematics

School	Points of Reference
Swift School	National Standard National Curriculum Level
Albatross School	National Standard School Expectation
Mallard School	Expectation
Stork School	National Curriculum Level
Robin School	Numeracy Strategy Stage National Standard Expectation
Magpie School	National Standard
Pelican School	National Standard National Curriculum Level Numeracy Stage
Sparrow School	National Standard National Curriculum Level Numeracy Stage

Stork and Pelican Schools adopted the same approach to sub-dividing the National Curriculum Levels as they had taken with writing. Sparrow School included the child’s numeracy stage on their report and used a three point code to indicate sub-division of the stages including the letters *B (basic)*, *P (proficient)*, or *A (advanced)* to qualify the level of achievement.

Extract from Sparrow School Report

New Zealand Curriculum Level 1					Curriculum Level 2	Curriculum Level 3
Year 1. The first National Standard is for children who have been at school 12 months						
EM	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Year 2 (12 month anniversary in Red) National Standard at 12 months of schooling						
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3 Feb 2010	Stage 4 June/ Nov 2010	Stage 5	Stage 6
Year 3 (24 month anniversary in Red) National Standard at 24 months of schooling						
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4 Feb/June /Nov 2011	Stage 5	Stage 6
36 month anniversary in Red - National Standard at 36 months of schooling shaded						
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4 Feb 2012	Stage 5	Stage 6
Year 4 (At the end of Year 4 in Red) National Standard at the end of Year 4 shaded						
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5 June 2012 5b	Stage 6
Year 5 (At the end of Year 5 in Red) National Standard at the end of Year 5 shaded						
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6

This coding was explained for parents at the bottom of the report. Robin School also reported the child’s numeracy stage but they did not include any additional detail to indicate if the child was just beginning the stage or approaching the end.

Narratives and Tables

Schools supplemented information about National Standards in their tables with either short or extended narratives. Magpie School included a medium sized box for the teacher to provide an explanation of the child’s achievement. Under the template heading “Reading”, the teacher wrote:

William¹ is an enthusiastic reader who is able to make connections between his prior knowledge and the information within a story. William is a very fluent reader and enjoys reading aloud. He consistently makes predictions about the meanings of unfamiliar words, however, he is not rereading

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all students.

around those unfamiliar words to evaluate whether his prediction fits the context of the sentence. William can read independently at his level and is able to locate answers within a story. (Magpie School, p.2)

Robin School provided a smaller box for the teacher's comment. The template included subject headings "Reading", "Writing" and "Maths" with sub-headings "Summary of Progress", "Next Learning Steps" and "Home Support" in boxes within which the teacher then wrote a short comment, for example:

Summary of Progress

- *Retells what has happened in her own words*
- *Answers literal questions about a text*

(Robin School, p.2)

Many of the terms used in the narratives were technical in nature and parents might find them challenging to interpret, for example 'learning progressions', 'numeracy stage' and 'instructional level'.

Several of the reports (Albatross School, Magpie School, Swift School) made reference to student behaviour or attitude in relation to the designated curriculum area. Chris's report from Swift School said:

Chris enjoys reading to an audience and does so fluently. He now needs to adhere to the meanings within the text – reconstructing information that is contained in different sentences, and inferencing. (Swift School, p.2)

In addition, some schools used tables to convey statistical information about student achievement and/or progress. Robin School included tables to report achievement and progress in reading, writing and maths.

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For example:

Writing

<i>Level</i>	<i>Em1</i>	<i>Em2</i>	<i>1B</i>	<i>1P</i>	<i>1A</i>	<i>2B</i>	<i>2P</i>	<i>2A</i>	<i>3B</i>	<i>3P</i>	<i>3A</i>	<i>4B</i>
	<i>In February your child was working at</i>											
<i>February</i>						✓						
	<i>In April your child was working at</i>											
<i>April</i>						✓						
	<i>In June your child was working at</i>											
<i>June</i>							✓					

(Robin School p.2)

To summarise, when reporting reading, writing and mathematics schools used a range of points of reference within their reports. All schools used the National Standards with many using National Curriculum levels as well. In reading and mathematics subject specific points of reference were used for example, when reporting reading some schools mentioned Ready to Read Colour Wheel levels or instructional levels, whilst when reporting mathematics Numeracy Stage were referred to. The subject within which there was greatest diversity in points of reference used was reading. Schools also included significant amounts of technical language when describing student progress and achievement.

Effort and Attitude

Three schools included an estimate of the child's effort in reading, writing and mathematics. Mallard School and Magpie School did not give an indication of the full range of descriptors being used, only those that indicated where the child 'sat'. So the two descriptors used on Mallard's report were "*strength*" or "*developing*" whilst Magpie School included "*excellent*". Stork School's template included attitude and effort as a category on a chart under the headings of reading, writing and mathematics. The child's consistency of attitude and effort within each subject was indicated by a tick on the chart. None of the reports provided further explanation about how effort ratings were determined.

Where To Next

Seven schools included specific ‘next learning steps’ sections for reading, writing and mathematics on their report templates. These were usually presented in the form of short narrative statements. The statements sometimes included technical language. Linda’s teacher identified her next steps as to:

Gain a deeper understanding of the text message by analysing the poetic language of the author (Mallard School, p.2)

Chris’s teacher said that his next learning steps in reading were to:

To deduce the meaning of unknown vocabulary from the context. To develop understanding of literal and figurative language using the context of the text. (Swift School, p.2)

Sparrow School used longer narrative statements to describe next learning steps with Carrie’s teacher stating that:

Carrie is learning to consistently work on feedback and success criteria when proof reading and editing a piece of writing to enhance her work. She is working on varying sentence beginnings and lengths. Carrie is developing the skill of using her planning to help her organise her ideas and thoughts into paragraphs and sequencing these using connectives and specific language features to interest the audience. (Sparrow School, p.3)

Pelican School listed a range of skills and knowledge required for reading, writing and mathematics within their ‘Learning Progression’ documents. An accompanying letter explained “*Progressions of learning in reading, writing and mathematics. Your child’s teacher and your child have together identified focus goals for the year.*” Some of the statements on the learning progressions were ticked and others were highlighted. The ticks and highlighting were not explained further.

Five schools followed up the identification of the child’s next learning steps with suggestions for how parents could help their child at home. Mallard, Robin and Sparrow Schools provided suggestions for reading, writing and mathematics.

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These were generally short statements, for example the teacher suggested that Lily should:

Continue to discuss pictures and new words with Linda. Discuss similar experiences she has had to a character. (Mallard School, p.2)

Robin School incorporated greater personalisation into the comment made with Edina's teacher saying:

Thank you for supporting Edina by reading with her at home. This has helped her practice taught skills and build mileage. Please continue to read with her and ask questions about the book where she need to use her opinion to answer them. (Robin School, p.2)

Swift and Pelican Schools made suggestions only in relation to how to help with mathematics. Pelican School did include space on their report for how to help in reading and writing as well, however these sections were not completed.

Reporting Other Information

Most schools reported to parents in relation to other National Curriculum areas as well as reading, writing and mathematics. The most frequently reported curriculum areas were the Arts (six schools) and PE and Health (five schools). Achievement and/or progress in Social Studies, Science and Technology were reported by four schools under the heading of "Inquiry", "Unit Studies", "Integrated units" or "Topic". Oral Language and the Key Competencies were the next most frequently reported curriculum areas with three schools reporting each. Te Reo (two schools) and ICT (one school) were the least frequently reported subjects.

Points of Reference Used When Reporting Other Curriculum Areas

There was least consistency in the points of reference used to report progress and achievement when reporting on other curriculum areas.

Table 5

Points of Reference Used When Reporting Progress and Achievement in Other Curriculum Areas

School	Points of Reference
Swift School	None
Albatross School	A-C achievement grade
Mallard School	Expectation (Unit Studies only)
Stork School	None
Robin School	“Mindful Behaviour” statements (key competencies)
Magpie School	None
Pelican School	Did not report other curriculum areas
Sparrow School	Key Competencies

As shown in Table 5, four schools identified points of reference being used to assess student progress and achievement in other curriculum areas. Albatross School used a three point scale (A-C) to indicate student achievement in Oral English. A similar three point A-C scale was used to report on other curriculum areas however, this referred to student attitude, interest, participation and, in the case of ‘Topic’, progress. Mallard School included a four point scale (above, at, below, well below) to indicate student performance in Unit Studies in relation to ‘Expectation’. It was not made explicit whose ‘expectation’ this was or which curriculum areas were included in ‘Unit Studies’.

Both Robin School and Mallard School reported on progress or frequency of use of skills and attitudes identified in the Key Competencies. Robin School used a bar graph to indicate the child’s success in ‘managing themselves’:

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These bars show how successful your child is at managing themselves.	
Consistency - trying hard all the time, positive attitude, managing self.	
Respect - use manners, look after people, property, environment, self.	
Integrity - doing the right thing, honest, responsible.	
Persistence - setting goals, keep on trying, giving the best.	

(Robin School, p.4)

These skills statements are based upon those identified in the Key Competencies section of the New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1 – 13 (2007, p.12). They also include personal qualities and attitudes such as respect and integrity which are two of the values incorporated in the New Zealand Curriculum.

Narratives and Tables

Some schools incorporated boxes or charts to indicate the child's achievement in the remaining curriculum areas. For example, the Key Competencies were reported through the use of charts or tables. Magpie School included a chart with frequency of actions identified:

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Extract from Key Competency Chart

Managing Self	Consistently	Usually	Needs Developing
Stays on task	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Follows instructions	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Acceptable work presentation	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

(Magpie School, p.4)

Albatross School incorporated reporting on multiple learning areas into a chart titled “Other Areas of the National Curriculum”:

Extract from Albatross School Report

Essential Learning Areas	Attitude	Achievement
Oral English		
Speaking	A	B
Listening	B	B
Other Subjects		
General Progress and Interest in Topic: (Social Studies, Science, Technology, Health)	A	
Attitude, interest and use of ICT	A	
Attitude, interest and participation in The Arts	A	
Attitude to and participation in Physical Education	A	

(Albatross School, p.3)

Schools also included spaces on their templates for teachers to write narrative comments about a child’s achievement and progress in other curriculum areas. Sometimes this was in the form of specific boxes within which teachers could

write free text to describe the child's achievement and progress. For example, Mallard School included separate sections for additional curriculum areas although space was limited and comments were restricted to approximately two sentences per subject area. Next to the heading "The Arts", Linda's teacher wrote that she:

was able to complete her latest piece of art, showing skill in painting a series of lines, colouring in, and using scissors to cut a series of complicated shapes and pictures. (Mallard School, p.2)

Magpie School also included subject headings for some other curriculum areas. Under the heading "Oral Language" William's teacher wrote that he:

..is a very capable speaker and uses expression and varied tone. He often questions for understanding and is able to reflect on his learning and next steps (Magpie School, p.3)

Sparrow School did not identify which subjects were being covered within the overarching theme of inquiry but an extended comment next to the heading "Inquiry" to report dispositional qualities such as confidence or particular competencies a child was developing saying that Carrie:

is gaining confidence in asking questions and brainstorming her ideas to help her enquire about the topic being studied. She is learning to select appropriate information from a variety of sources with some support and make notes in her own words. Carrie is learning to summarise this information and share her understanding with her peers
(Sparrow School, p.3)

Carrie had also participated in an Enrichment Programme relating to inquiry learning. Her teacher made further comments under this heading relating to confidence, attitude and skills in inquiry learning.

Not all schools had a separate section of the report for the reporting of other curriculum areas. Swift and Stork Schools included a space for brief comments about other learning areas in the 'General Comments' section at the end of the report. As the 'General Comments' section needed to include a wide range of

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information, the individual statements relating to curriculum areas tended to be very brief. For example, Chris’s teacher reported that he:

did very well in our ‘swimming’ sessions and will give most things a go
(Swift School, p.3)

Karen’s teacher reported that she:

finds art activities motivating and is working hard to develop her skills in painting and drawing. (Stork School, p.4)

Mallard School used a shorter narrative next to the heading “*General Comments*”. The teacher said that Linda:

...is a highly motivated, diligent student who is beginning to choose challenging activities to extend her thinking. It was wonderful to see that she entered the writing competition. Her piece of writing was lovely to read. (Mallard School, p.2)

Others included extended narratives in their reporting. Damien’s teacher reported a range of information regarding behaviour and attitudes under the heading “*General Comment*” saying that:

Damien has been developing his confidence to become an independent learner in most curriculum areas. Damien is learning how to control his responses when things have not gone the way he wants. He is also developing the correct strategies to consistently be a positive class member. Damien shows a passion in ICT and is able to share his love and knowledge of computers and technology with his peers. It is a pleasure having Damien in Room XX. (Albatross School, p.3)

Effort Ratings and Behaviour

Albatross School graded students on their attitude in curriculum areas other than the core areas using an A to C scale.

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Six schools (Sparrow, Magpie, Stork, Mallard, Albatross and Swift Schools) included a “General Comment” on their reports. Teachers included information about the child’s behaviour in the “General Comment” boxes.

For example:

Chris is a caring young man who has settled in well into Room XX and the Senior School. I am very proud of the way he has put himself forward to take on extra school-wide responsibilities. He is kind and thoughtful, looking out for others in his class and makes a genuine effort to please.
(Swift School, p.3)

Magpie School included additional information about behaviour in a small chart “Attendance, Punctuality and Classroom Behaviour”. This required the teacher to tick either “Excellent”, “Satisfactory” or “Of concern”.

Other Information

Swift, Sparrow and Stork Schools were all religious schools and their report templates included sections providing parents with information about their child’s knowledge of religious concepts and traditions covered as well as their attitudes and behaviour.

Six schools (Mallard, Albatross, Swift, Magpie, Robin and Stork Schools) included attendance information for parents with the latter three recording a statement about the child’s punctuality as well.

Summary

Schools used diverse formats for their reports with little commonality of structure, content or terminology. For all schools the primary focus of the documents was reporting progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics but schools did this using a range of points of reference, language and differing amounts of detail. Most schools included information about other curriculum areas but information provided tended to be more brief. Whilst all schools did include some information about the child’s next learning steps this sometimes included technical language. In addition, only five schools followed this up with

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information about how parents could help their children at home and this information was not always provided for each of the core subject areas of reading, writing and mathematics.

The following chapter explores parents' responses to their children's school reports and investigates their understanding of their child's progress and achievement as outlined in the reports.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS - PARENTS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF THEIR CHILD’S REPORT

This chapter presents parents’ understandings of the information presented in their child’s written report in three sections: parents’ understanding of reporting against National Standards, parents’ understanding of other curriculum areas and parents’ understanding of behaviour and attitude

As shown in Table 6, eight participants were interviewed. All were female with children from across the primary school age range. The participants’ children attended schools from a range of deciles, from 1 through to 10 with three designated as full primary schools (Years 0-8) and five specified as contributing schools (Years 0-6) including three schools with a religious focus.

Table 6

Participant and School Profiles

Participant name	Child name	Year level	School	Decile	Type	Religious
Emily	Carrie	4	Sparrow School	10	Contributing	Yes
Eliza	Chris	5	Swift School	6	Full Primary	Yes
Carla	Karen	2	Stork School	2	Full Primary	Yes
Lara	Damien	1	Albatross School	6	Full Primary	No
Holly	Susan	3	Pelican School	3	Contributing	No
Jasmine	Edina	3	Robin School	1	Contributing	No
Melanie	William	6	Magpie School	1	Contributing	No
Lily	Linda	4	Mallard School	2	Contributing	No

Note. Pseudonyms are used for all participants, children and schools.

Findings – Parents’ Understandings of their Child’s Report

All parents received mid year reports about their child’s progress and achievement. Table 7 presents the timing of reports and whether parents received and took up offers of teacher – parent interviews. Common to all schools was the timing of reports. All provided parents with written reports mid-way through the academic year. In addition all participants were offered teacher - parent interviews during the course of the year. Seven of the eight participants chose to attend the interview. Lily did not attend her child’s interview “*because I’m satisfied with the report and I told my daughter I don’t have any questions to discuss with the teacher, I’m happy with the report*” (interview, p.1).

Table 7

Report Timings and Interview Attendance

Participant name	School	Report Date	Teacher – Parent interview attended
Emily	Sparrow School	Mid Year (No date)	✓
Eliza	Swift School	June 2012	✓
Carla	Stork School	Mid Year (No date)	✓
Lara	Albatross School	July 2012	✓
Holly	Pelican School	May 2012	✓
Jasmine	Robin School	June 2012	✓
Melanie	Magpie School	June 2012	✓
Lily	Mallard School	Mid Year (No date)	Interview offered but did not attend

Parents’ Understanding of Reporting Against National Standards

General Understanding of Progress and Achievement

Parents knew that their child’s report told them generally how well he/she was progressing and/or achieving. Parents believed that reporting against National Standards helped them to know about their child’s achievement and was useful as

they could “*understand where our child is at...*” (Melanie interview, p.8). When talking about her overall initial impression of her child’s report Lara stated:

... the overall message I got from this report that he was on track, average or above average for everything (interview, p.2);

and as Jasmine noted, the reference point for making judgements about progress was a stated National Standard;

she’s meeting her National Standard which is really good (interview, p.3).

Other parents also used phrases associated with National Standards. Terms such as ‘on track’, ‘where they’re at’, ‘above average’ are embedded in the language of the Standards. Participants were all conversant with this vocabulary and used it throughout their interviews. However, it was apparent they did not necessarily fully understand what the language meant. Emily for example admitted that she “[*didn’t*] know what the National Standard is” (interview, p.3) while for Eliza ‘National Standards’ indicated the title of the report explaining, “*So really seeing National Standards on the reports just is like the name of the report to me.*” (interview, p.2).

All parents had a sense that the report documented their child’s progress as well as achievement. Most assumed their child must be progressing well as reported achievement levels were generally at or above stated expectations. Some parents did have an explicit understanding of their child’s progress and were able to use tables showing their child’s achievement over time as aids to help them describe and understand progress. Emily for example received a multi-part report for Carrie which consisted of a narrative document and a ‘National Standards Report’ in the form of a series of tables showing Carrie’s achievement in reading, writing and mathematics from Years 1 to 4. When talking about her child’s progress in these core curriculum areas Emily referred to the tables explaining:

In the National Standards report, I mean I can see her going from stage to stage and that’s highlighted between, you know, the years one to four (interview, p.4).

Whilst Emily was not necessarily aware of the full meaning of the information presented, as it seemed she did not fully grasp what the levels on the chart represented, she could see the level that Carrie was achieving at each assessment and identify the progress made by observing the changing positions of the coloured square on the table. This gave her an understanding that Carrie’s learning was moving forward and hence she was making progress.

Others spoke of a *belief* that their child had made progress. Further questioning revealed that this belief stemmed from a range of factors including the child’s current achievement as stated on their report, discussion with the teacher and their own observation of their child’s developing skills and abilities. Two parents gained an insight into their child’s progress through discussion with the teacher. Melanie stated that the narrative comment on her child’s report indicated to her that William was making progress and discussion with the teacher helped as “*she was able to give us examples*” (interview p.6).

When Eliza was asked about her child’s progress she described Chris’s reading, writing and mathematics skills based on her observations of activities that were carried out at home. However a problem arose when directly asked for examples from the report that might illustrate this progress. Eliza attempted to find examples but then replied that she did not know how to answer the question:

I don’t know that I can see progress in the report. It seems to be very generic it’s not really knuckling down on any one thing, it is very broad and very basic. (interview, p.4).

Parents referred to their child’s achievement as outlined in their report when asked how their child was progressing.

I think she is achieving what is sort of the level that she’s supposed to at the moment (Carla interview, p.3)

The report says here that she is above expectation (Lily interview, p.3).

Such comments suggest that the parents were unclear about the distinction between progress and achievement. They presumed that as their child met the

required standard in the curriculum area that must mean that they were making progress.

If the child’s achievement and/or progress appeared to be good then most parents seemed happy with their child’s report:

I’m really happy with her maths as well (Jasmine interview, p.3);

all positive (Lily interview, p.1).

An additional factor contributing to parental satisfaction was the degree to which they felt the report confirmed their knowledge of their child. It seemingly gave them confidence that they were receiving reliable information. Parents identified teacher comments that supported their own understandings of their child. Lara for example was pleased that the teacher made reference to Damien’s enthusiasm for ICT and technology. She knew this was a curriculum area he enjoyed and the comment aligned with her own knowledge of Damien. She felt that some of the teacher’s remarks had captured both positive aspects of her child’s achievement and also identified areas that he was finding difficult and that she too was concerned about. She spoke of checking “*to make sure she knows my child*” (interview, p.5). Emily compared her own experiences of her child’s learning to those outlined by the teacher in the report and was happy as “*I know she is a hard worker and that shows through in her reports and I suppose the way I see her progress at school does reflect what the reports are telling me.*” (interview, pp.3-4). For these parents the information in their child’s report aligned with their own knowledge of their child and this acted as confirmation that they were receiving reliable information. The trustworthiness of the information was also reinforced by parental belief that, underpinning the entire process must be “*measures*” (Lara, interview p.4). Few parents questioned the information they were presented with but rather accepted and repeated it, apparently assuming it to be accurate and as a consequence, reliable.

There was, however, an exception to this generally positive picture. Eliza felt that the next learning steps that the teacher had identified for Chris in reading, “*needs to determine the meaning of unknown words from the context*” did not resonate with her own ideas about his capabilities. This created an uncertainty for her about

the reliability of the information and she explained “*I find that he does that quite well at home when we are working together. So a little bit unsure about that myself*” (interview, p.3). This uncertainty impacted on her overall satisfaction with the report.

It would appear that if their child’s report contained information that aligned with a parent’s understanding and knowledge of their child and was generally giving a positive achievement message then the parent was not only happy but also confident in the reliability of the information.

Parents’ Understanding of Their Child’s Progress and Achievement in Reading

Parents had formed a general view about their child’s progress and achievement in reading – all believed that their child’s achievement and progress was average to good.

Understanding of Points of Reference Used

As mentioned in Chapter Four, schools used differing and in some cases, multiple points of reference to report student progress and achievement in reading. During their interviews parents mentioned points of reference that they had noted in their child’s report. The first of these was a general reference to the National Standards:

they’ve highlighted the levels that Edina’s age group should be at, National Standards (Jasmine interview, p.2);

I can see Carrie is above National Standard because it’s highlighted in yellow. (Emily interview, p.2).

These parents had identified the level their child should be achieving and, in Emily’s case, she noted that her child’s achievement had been identified as above the expected level. One parent referred to her child’s reading age, saying “*she’s actually above her reading age, she’s eight but she’s reading at Year Six, 10 to 11 years old*” (Holly interview, p.1). Holly found this information easy to understand as she knew Susan’s chronological age and could clearly see that she was reading above that level. This was a good indicator that Holly found easy to understand.

Parents readily grasped where their child was ‘at’ when a clear point of reference was stated or the child’s achievement was reported in relation to age.

It was less straightforward to understand points of reference when these were written using technical language. Chris’s report for instance included multiple points of reference to explain his progress and achievement in reading including “*Expected Level 2-3*”, “*Working within the National Standard for Reading*”, “*Instructional Level 11 -12.5*” (Swift School report, p2). No explanations were provided about what each of these different levels and points of reference meant. Eliza noted she did not understand the term ‘instructional level’. She identified that her son was level 11 – 12.5 but was unsure about how to interpret the information:

whether that means he’s got the reading level of an 11 year old to 12 and a half year old or that’s the level of the book (interview, p.1).

Whilst the teacher and school were familiar with the language of assessment and reporting and may have believed the points of reference were clear, in fact this was far from the case. It seemed that Eliza had not previously encountered the phrase “instructional level”. She was, however, attempting to understand the information and was aware that the point of reference might have one of two meanings. She understood that books can be graded according to level but also knew that that a chronological reading age might be recorded. The inclusion of the word “years” at the end of the sentence would have enabled the parent to understand that this was, in fact a chronological level that was being referred to. While that would not have resolved the issue created by the use of the technical term “instructional level” it would have afforded greater clarity.

Several schools included an ‘expectation’ or ‘expected level’ on their reports and this was problematic. In particular this was the case where the point of reference for the stated ‘expectation’ was not clear. Linda’s report from Mallard School included ‘expectation’ as a point of reference when describing progress and achievement in reading but gave little further information about what this ‘expectation’ was based on. The cover of the report stated that the assessments represented individual student’s performance “*in relation to that of all children of*

the same year group across New Zealand” (Mallard School report, p.1). Linda’s report included a tick in the ‘above expectation’ column for reading. Her mother, Lily, interpreted the information as meaning that her daughter was reading at above the level expected for her age explaining that she “*has a high level of reading....it’s above her age*” (interview, p.1). The report did not explicitly mention Linda’s reading age but Lily assumed that she must be reading above her reading age as the report indicated her reading achievement was ‘above expectation’.

Understanding of Narratives

Short and extended narratives were intended to give parents more detail about their child’s learning throughout the year or provide comment on the child’s strengths and weaknesses. For some parents the statements gave limited insight into their child’s learning. When asked about her general impression of her child’s reading Melanie, for example, understood from the report that her son was an enthusiastic reader and made predictions. However, his report also stated:

He consistently makes predictions about the meanings of unfamiliar words, however, he is not rereading around those unfamiliar words to evaluate whether his prediction fits the context of the sentence. (Magpie School Report, p.1).

Melanie did not explain what she believed the rest of the comment meant. She grasped the straightforward reference to her child’s enthusiasm but appeared to find the professional language more challenging to interpret. For another parent the complex presentation of the narrative on her child’s report led to a significant misunderstanding. During the course of the interview, while discussing Damien’s reading and looking through the sections of narrative comment, Lara realised that she had overlooked a key piece of information about Damien’s achievement and progress, exclaiming:

oh, I beg your pardon, it says here it’s below expectations. I didn’t pick that up. Mm, there’s a comment there that I did not pick up, how interesting. (interview, p.1).

Lara had not previously noticed or focussed on the short narrative comments summarising progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. These comments were located within a page of information presented in a visually complex manner incorporating narrative comment, bullet point comments and tables. As a result Lara had failed to note a significant statement that provided important information about her child’s achievement.

Parents’ Understanding of Their Child’s Progress and Achievement in Writing

Parents’ impressions of their children’s progress and achievement in writing were generally positive. All had the sense that their children were either achieving well in some or all aspects of writing or that they enjoyed the creative process of telling stories.

Understanding of Points of Reference Used

Five of the parents mentioned points of reference from their child’s report when talking about writing. Emily for instance noted “*it shows me that she’s at National Standard*” (interview, p.2). Other points of reference were also identified including levels, age and ‘expectation’:

there’s a chart at different levels. There’s level one, level two, level three and currently she’s at level two. Again she’s above her age (Holly interview, p.2);

it says that he’s on track towards expectation (Lara interview, p.2);

he’s got the spelling age of 9.8 years old (Eliza interview, p.5).

However, parents’ understanding of the points of reference varied considerably. A clear point of reference such as age was more readily understood than others with Eliza explaining “*I have a better understanding of that because I think well he’s nine, he’s got 9.8 years okay, so we are doing okay*” (interview, p.4).

Eliza grasped that, as Chris’s reported spelling age was higher than his chronological age he must be achieving well. Points of reference that were less easily understood such as ‘expectation’ left parents wanting additional information. Lily knew that Linda was achieving well in writing and had looked

to find out more specific information about what level Linda was achieving but was unable to find a writing level on the report noting *“It doesn’t say in here”* (Lily interview, p.2). Lily attempted to locate a more detailed and easily understood point of reference than ‘expectation’ to enable her to explain Linda’s achievement in greater detail but realised that the information had not been provided. She did explain that she believed Linda was progressing well in writing, because *“in reading and writing it’s above”* (interview, p.3). In fact, this revealed a misunderstanding of the information presented in the report. The teacher’s narrative comment referred to Linda’s spelling as *“well above her chronological age”* whilst the overall assessment shown on the report indicated that she was achieving *“at expectation”*. This use of two different points of reference would appear to have caused an issue for the parent. Lily may have focussed on the *“well above”* part of the narrative as this phrase was both positive and more straightforward to understand. However, she overlooked the important part of the message being presented – that her child was achieving *“at expectation”*.

Another parent commented that they recognised the point of reference (National Standard) being used to describe her child’s progress and achievement but did not understand how the child was meeting the required standard stating *“I can’t see what makes her National Standard”* (Emily interview, p.2). Lack of supporting information to explain both what the Standard was and exactly how Carrie met it meant that, whilst Emily had the general sense that her child must be achieving well she did not fully understand Carrie’s achievements. Parents were attempting to find points of reference within their child’s reports to help them gain a clearer picture of their child’s progress and achievement in writing. However, once located, the information did not always prove useful. This was most frequently the case where the point of reference related to stated ‘expectations’ or ‘National Standards’ neither of which were explained through the information.

Understanding of Narratives

Similar to reading, all schools used either short or extended narratives to convey information about progress and achievement in writing. Four parents had identified their child’s areas of strength or weaknesses from the comments.

However, the intended messages of the comments were not always clear to parents who, at times, became confused. An example of this was Lara’s discussion about Damien’s achievements in writing. She explained how she had found some of the narrative comments useful as she believed she had been able to identify some of Damien’s writing skills saying “*it does say that he can record all the main sounds which is good. He can record all basic words correctly*” (interview, p.4). Lara had mentioned this information earlier in the interview and was, at this point repeating it to sum up her understanding of her child’s achievement in writing. However, scrutiny of the report comments revealed that this was not the information being presented. In fact, Damian’s report stated that he could record *most* basic words correctly and write *some* dominant sounds. Recording all main sounds and consistently recording all basic words correctly had been identified as his *next learning steps*. Lara had not realised the distinctions being made. In addition she went on to explain that she would like more information about some areas mentioned in the narrative as she felt the comments were generally broad and gave few concrete examples.

the feedback is probably lessis a little bit more minimal than some of the other areas that give you some really tangible.. .. examples. (interview, p.4).

Lara was seeking some specific illustrations of Damien’s achievement that she could understand rather than the brief narrative statements the teacher had provided. However, not all parents viewed feedback as minimal and lacking in detail. Jasmine had a positive view of the short narrative comments on her child’s report. She believed them to be concise, clearly worded and containing sufficient detail to enable her to understand Edina’s achievement, know what Edina needed to do next and understand how to support her. Jasmine was not faced with attempting to understand a plethora of technical information which she appreciated could be challenging.

In the absence of achievement information that they could understand and refer to, several parents made reference to aspects of their child’s writing that were not mentioned in the report. They appeared to be focussing mainly on their knowledge of their child’s written work. In Eliza’s case her own beliefs about

Chris’s achievements differed from the information presented to her in Chris’s report. Eliza understood that Chris wrote imaginatively and knew that his paragraphing required additional work. However, she also commented his punctuation and handwriting required some improvement. This was in contrast to Chris’s report which stated “*He is punctuating sentences accurately, using capital letters, full stops and exclamation marks.*” (Swift School report, p.2). The report did not mention handwriting at all. Eliza used her own knowledge of Chris’s writing to inform her views. She went on to explain how she was supporting her child, encouraging him to take more time when writing. She believed that this was enabling Chris to improve his use of surface features when writing.

Parents’ Understanding of Their Child’s Progress and Achievement in Mathematics

Parents all understood something of their child’s progress and achievement in mathematics. Some believed their children were doing well and enjoying the subject whilst others believed there were areas their children needed to work on.

Understanding of Points of Reference Used

As explained in Chapter Four, schools used a relatively narrow range of points of reference when reporting progress and achievement in mathematics. However, only three parents mentioned these points of reference to describe their child’s progress and achievement in mathematics. Holly and Emily talked about their child’s achievement in relation to the National Standard as follows:

Maths...she’s ..at the National Standard level after three years of school.
(Holly interview, p.2);

she’s [Carrie] at National Standard again so it shows me she’s improved at a basic level (Emily interview, p.3).

Another parent recognised that her child was “*above expectation*” (Lily interview, p.2). However, whilst these parents had identified the specific points of reference mentioned they did not appear to know what each one meant.

Emily qualified her statement about Carrie’s achievement, pointing out that “*It doesn’t tell me what she has achieved or what the National Standard is at year four*” (interview, p.3). Parents grasped the overall message that their child was achieving ‘at standard’ or was making progress, however understandings of their achievement appeared to be somewhat superficial.

Understanding of narratives

The information included in teachers’ narrative comments usually described things a child could do or skills that they had been learning. An issue identified by Lara and Emily was the broad nature of the teachers’ comments. In Lara’s case she recognised that the teacher had commented on Damien’s counting and number knowledge:

It gives you, you know, some pretty standard stuff about what he can count up to, what he’s identifying, the things he’s beginning to achieve
(interview, p.2).

However, later in the interview she explained that whilst she could see that the report briefly summarised her child’s achievement and stated that he was meeting expectations, she felt that it would have been helpful to be given some information about what the expectations being referred to were. Having more detailed, meaningful information would have given her a context within which she could interpret and understand Damien’s achievements.

Another difficulty indicated by some parents’ comments was the inclusion of technical language within the mathematics narratives. Lily and Carla gave explicit information about their child’s progress and achievement in mathematics, however they did this by reading and/or repeating the comments verbatim without further explanation:

she has a great understanding of numbers and place value it says here and displays great enthusiasm to learn new games and strategies (Lily interview, p.2);

she’s able to select appropriate equipment to solve problems and she could explain mathematical process (Carla interview, p.2).

Whilst they had been able to identify this information about their child’s progress and achievement, the fact that they read the comments verbatim and did not explain further suggests that they lacked confidence in their own interpretation of the information and suggests they may not have fully understood it.

It was noticeable during discussions with parents about their child’s progress and achievement in mathematics that they made only brief comment about their understandings in relation to their child’s report. Several made greater reference to their own experiences of their child’s understanding of mathematics and activities they carried out with their child at home. Most appeared to grasp the broad achievement message of the mathematics reporting perhaps due to the narrower range of points of reference used to explain progress and achievement. However, the absence of additional information may have been a reflection of the lack of confidence outlined above.

Parents’ understanding of ‘next steps’ and ‘how to help’ in reading, writing and mathematics

All parents were keen to support their children’s learning at home. They wanted to know the next ‘things’ that their children would be working on to enable them to help. Generally the next steps section of the reports was interpreted as outlining ways in which parents could help their child. Parents stated that they found the ‘next learning steps/how to help’ useful in aiding them to achieve this:

very informational because I can focus on that and I can use that as a strategy to help her (Lily interview, p.3);

I would always go to the next steps actually because for me that is helpful for the parent to know in what ways we can help my daughter at home (Carla interview, p.4).

Seemingly parents looked for and appreciated clear, specific guidance as to how to help their child achieve their next learning steps:

sometimes as parents we think just reading a book is enough, but then um, if you have a look in here it’s telling me I need to question her a bit, question marks why was that there. I mean just getting a bit more in depth with her

reading not just ...and I see the difference. It’s really helpful ‘cause I’m like what’s that, it’s a comma, why is it there and she’ll explain in to me. So it’s not just boring old read, read, read. Found it really helpful in everything. (Jasmine interview, p.2).

Some parents acknowledged that they may not have sufficient understanding of subjects to assist their child. Holly raised the question of how parents would be able to help their child if they were unsure of the concepts the children were learning or lacked knowledge in the area:

there were some questions like what if we don’t know the topic and how are we going to teach our kids, if we don’t know the material ourselves (interview, p.3).

She went on to explain that she believed her child’s school had addressed this by providing parents with additional support through meetings and targeted introductory work.

The issue of the timing of reporting was also raised with Eliza commenting “*I thought that was good but I personally would, it would be nice to have that sooner than two terms into the year.*” (interview, p.2). Eliza was positive about supporting her child and appreciated information that would enable her to do so. However receiving the information halfway through the school year was perceived as too late and she was aware of the missed opportunities to help her son improve in areas that needed further development.

As can be seen from examples previously identified in Chapter Four, many of the suggestions teachers made in the next learning steps/how to help sections of the reports incorporated significant amounts of professional language. This could provide an explanation for why, despite having recognised that the teacher was providing information about next steps and/or how to help their child, only one parent was able to explain it in their own words. When asked for specific examples of advice they had been given about how to help their child many parents simply repeated or read what was on the report, saying the advice had been useful without elaborating any further.

Emily viewed her child’s report as focussing on current learning. The ‘next learning steps/learning goals’ section had been phrased in the present tense and stated what her child was learning to do at that point in time which Emily interpreted as being achievement information. She wanted more information about the *next* stage in her child’s learning and how to help her child reach that goal:

I kind of want to know, right what do we need to do to get to the next stage to look ahead (Emily interview, p.4).

In addition Emily felt that although some suggestions about how parents could support their child were provided the comments on her daughter’s report were not sufficiently targeted to her needs. Comments such as “*Continuing to read a variety of material independently every day*” and “*practising basic facts and times tables*” (Sparrow School Report, p.3) appeared to be generic statements. Whilst this type of activity might have value and may well be beneficial for Carrie to complete it appeared to Emily as if a standard statement had been written. It provided little guidance for her in how to support Carrie and she was left without a clear understanding of what her child should be focussing on next or how to help her.

Parents’ Understanding of Other Curriculum Areas

Whilst seven parents were given some information about their child’s achievement and progress in curriculum areas other than reading, writing and mathematics, none talked about this information in any detail. Most made only a passing reference to other curriculum areas, simply listing them:

Ah, it’s about the reading, mathematics and there’s also written language, listening and speaking. Also there is arts, physical education and yeah so those are the curriculum for this particular year I suppose (Lily interview, p.1).

Mention was also made of the Key Competencies, religious education, listening and speaking, inquiry and ICT.

The inquiry learning is quite a good topic because I suppose it shows her interest in learning (Emily interview, p.3);

In regards the listening and speaking which the report says here that she is above expectation (Lily interview, p.3).

Parents valued information about other curriculum areas for different reasons. Emily for example was concerned about her daughter’s attitude to learning. She believed that if Carrie took a positive approach to tasks then achievement and progress would follow. The teacher’s comments about inquiry gave her an indication of how Carrie engaged with inquiry activities.

Jasmine in particular expressed a wish for a broader range of information beyond reading, writing and mathematics:

she’s quite artistic and she loves performing. So I’d like to hear more about that sort of thing, not just, I know these are important subjects, but not just so rigid reading, writing and maths cause there’s more to our children than just that at school (interview, p.4).

Parents knew that additional subjects were taught but were not able explain how their children were progressing and achieving in these areas. Their lack of comment about the other curriculum areas was perhaps a reflection of the very limited amount of information they were provided with about them.

Parents’ Understanding of Behaviour and Attitude

All but Holly were given information about their child’s behaviour and attitude in the written report. For six of these parents this information was located mainly in the ‘general comment’ section of the report, with some additional information being provided in subject specific comments. While most valued or liked to read the ‘general comment’ part of their child’s report as they enjoyed reading the positive comments or found it easier to understand than other parts of the reports, four parents felt that they were left with gaps in their understanding of their child’s behaviour, attitudes and social relationships:

I’d like to hear how she gets on with other peers in the class (Jasmine interview, p.4);

I know him from home but I don’t know what he’s like at school (Melanie interview, p.7);

So I’m interested in how she is in the class (Holly interview, p.4).

The problem parents faced when attempting to find out about their children’s behaviour and attitudes at school was the limited amount of information covered in the written reports. The emphasis within their children’s written reports was mainly on achievement and progress in specific subjects. In Holly’s case, her child’s report exclusively conveyed information about reading, writing and mathematics. However, parents wished to gain a more complete understanding of their child’s accomplishments, including their behaviour, relationships and attitudes. Where such information was received, Eliza was concerned that the remarks the teacher had made in the ‘general comment’ section of the report were overly positive. She felt that they might not fully reflect her child’s behaviour in the classroom:

It’s all good stuff, I’m sure there’s something in there that, you know, they’re happy, they’re lovely, they’re good, they’re doing well, they enjoy doing this, they enjoy doing that but I’m sure there’s aspects that happen every day at school with him that we as a parent could turn around and say well no that’s not okay, you need to stop doing that, but you don’t, I mean I don’t believe that in general comments is how he is every day (interview, p.4).

Eliza wished to be supportive of the teacher and ensure that her child was behaving appropriately in class. However, she was concerned that receiving exclusively positive information might mean that issues were not being reported to her. As a result she believed that she might be missing opportunities to discuss behaviour issues with Chris. Jasmine was also presented with information about Edina’s behaviour and attitudes through a chart on her child’s report which represented “Mindful Behaviour”. The skills and attitudes identified on the chart were related to the Key Competencies. She was confused by this information:

I don’t really know what that is telling me because we’ve got no really, what does that tell me. It’s not measurable (interview, p.5).

She was unclear how behaviours, attitudes and values such as consistency, respect, integrity and persistence could be measured and so did not feel that the chart presented her with any meaningful information.

Summary

Most of the parents had gained a general sense, through the written report, of the overall achievement of their child. However, comments about the detail revealed that they experienced some difficulties in interpreting the information they were presented with, suggesting their understandings were in many cases superficial and, in some instances, inaccurate. Throughout the interviews parents made reference to additional support they had received to assist them in understanding and interpreting their child’s report. This support included talking with the child’s teacher, school meetings, newsletters, portfolios of work and the child. At times the additional information gave the parent a clearer picture of their child’s achievements but often their understanding remained sketchy.

The following chapter will discuss the issues arising from these findings and the challenges facing parents and schools.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

In this discussion the extent to which parents taking part in the current study actually had a clear understanding of their child's written report is considered along with issues related to the development of a strong school-parent partnership. These issues are discussed in light of the literature and the challenges facing parents and schools explored.

The Ministry of Education states that providing parents with written reports containing clear, dependable information, will enable schools to establish a:

basis for building a strong partnership between the child, the teacher and the child's parents, family and whanau to support learning and improve student outcomes. (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b)

Parents in this study had a broad understanding of their child's achievement in the three key curriculum areas of reading, writing and mathematics, but not of the detail. This raises a number of issues regarding the viability of the Ministry of Education's stated aim and purpose of reporting – parental partnership. The Ministry envisaged partnership would be enabled through the principle of plain language reporting.

Plain Language Reporting

The Ministry of Education has strongly suggested to schools that, in order to facilitate the development of partnership with parents through improving parental understanding, reports should be written using plain language (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d). So how well was plain language reporting being fulfilled for the parents in this study?

Suggested ways of reporting in plain language include: ensuring that information is personal, relevant and succinct, using familiar vocabulary with terminology explained, giving illustrative examples and ensuring that assessment results are clearly phrased to facilitate parental understanding (Ministry of Education,

2010c). The assumption underlying these suggestions is that using plain language will achieve clarity and ensure information is accessible for parents. In the pursuit of clarity a broader definition of plain language could be considered encompassing language structure (short sentences), aspects of presentation (such as the use of bullet points), visual components (charts and graphs) and assessment results (potentially incorporating codes and grades) (Ministry of Education, 2010c). It could also be argued that clarity in terms of report formats be included in this list. Report formatting can have a significant impact on the reader's ability to understand information being presented. Features such as dense text or complex charts can hinder parents' understanding when reading reports and if a key objective is to ensure clarity then format needs to be addressed (The Practitioners Reporting Group, 2011). A range of possible templates which incorporate required elements are available to schools on a Ministry of Education supported website, along with examples of teacher jargon 'translated' into plain language report comments in reading, writing and mathematics (Ministry of Education, 2012b, n.d.-i). This type of support could prove invaluable to schools seeking to produce effective, clear reports.

Plain Language in relation to National Standards reporting in reading, writing and mathematics

In the past, general terms describing achievement such as "satisfactory" or "very good" offered little clarification of expectations of children but have frequently littered written reports (Kofoed, 2009; Marino et al., 2001). These have largely been replaced in teachers' reporting for reading, writing and mathematics by the terms 'at', 'above' or 'below' expectation – the language of National Standards. This National Standards terminology is deemed to be sufficiently well understood to be considered 'plain language' (Ministry of Education, n.d.-i). As evidenced in this study parents appear to be familiar with these words and are seemingly able to understand the broad message they convey. However, parents do not necessarily *fully* grasp what is meant in terms of their child's achievement and progress as the points of reference being used to describe progress and achievement remain unclear for some. This leads to parental uncertainty as to whether a national standard, age or an expectation is being used to describe the child's achievements.

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The notion of ‘expectation’ is particularly challenging for parents to understand as it could relate to age, curriculum level or expectation of the class (Hattie & Peddie, 2003). Unless it is made explicit what ‘expectation’ refers to parents may be unable to interpret the information.

In this study some schools appear to compound parental confusion by including several points of reference on their written reports for example, indicating National Curriculum level, age related level, reading ‘colour wheel’ level *and* National Standards achievement. It is difficult to discern the rationale for including more than one point of reference. It might be that schools’ intention is to provide parents with a range of information to justify the judgements being made about student achievement and progress. However, it might also be reasonable to presume inexperienced parents may be confused by facing an overwhelming amount of information. Limited achievement information on a report may lead parents to believe that the school is not disclosing *all* relevant information (Kofoed, 2009). In light of this it might be that, in order to ensure openness and transparency, schools believe they should include as much assessment data as possible so that parents are fully informed. This highlights an issue for teachers and schools and a challenge for parents. The use of a single point of reference for all reporting is problematic for teachers. It is the Ministry of Education’s intention that a range of assessments be used to inform teachers when making an Overall Teacher Judgement about a student’s achievement in relation to the National Standards (Ministry of Education, n.d.-g). However, the tasks used for assessment often employ *different* points of reference. This presents difficulties for teachers when attempting to make a judgement and report student performance in relation to the National Standard. Firstly, the teacher needs to understand how the assessment tools and points of reference used align with the National Standards statements. Guidance is provided regarding alignment of some assessment tools with the National Standards (Ministry of Education, n.d.-a) but the guidance is neither comprehensive nor clear. Secondly, schools then have to select which information is included on student reports – should the alignment of levels and stages be shown? Should the assessment data used to reach a judgement be included? A challenge arises for parents when schools choose to include multiple points of reference on student reports. A reasonable parental

reaction in the face of an overload of information would be to focus on that which is familiar and readily understood - in the case of this study the 'at', 'above' or 'below' either 'expectation' or 'standard' statements. This leads to a general yet shallow understanding of their child's achievement. Schools need to consider whether the information being presented aids parental understanding of their child's progress and achievement or whether it would be preferable to focus written reports on points of reference that are more readily understood.

Parents should be able to develop deep understandings of the detail and context of their child's achievements and how best to support their future learning through information provided in narrative comments. However, despite recommendations from the Ministry (Ministry of Education, n.d.-d) that reporting should be in plain language, the inclusion of technical language in comments remains and constitutes a barrier to understanding. As illustrated in the case of Melanie's understanding of her son's reading report, while comments may include information about current knowledge and skills and give an indication of areas for development, the messages of the report remain unclear calling into question the usefulness of comments. Including technical language may be a manifestation of the 'professional dilemma' teachers find themselves in when attempting to balance the need for clarity with the desire to produce a professional document (Crosby & Kim, 2006; Timperley & Robinson, 2004), however teacher comments are more likely to achieve their informative purpose if everyday words are substituted for less accessible language (Ministry of Education, n.d.-i). The challenge for teachers is how to translate technical language into plain English.

Plain language reporting in relation to other curriculum areas, behaviour and attitude.

The narrow focus of National Standards reporting is at odds with the approach parents in this study would have preferred. Parents want and value information about the full range of their child's achievements, skills and behaviours (Reporting to Parents Taskforce, 2006). It was of concern to some parents that they were provided with little or no information about their child's progress and achievement in other curriculum areas. In the case of this study parents received a mid year report for their child and so it was unclear if more detailed reporting

would follow at the end of the year. Unless parents receive additional information about the wider curriculum, behaviour and attitude from other school sources e.g. conversations with the teacher, it is unlikely that they will be fully informed about their child's progress and achievement in these areas.

The inherent diversity of the other subject areas being reported on meant that a wider range of points of reference was likely to be used to describe progress and achievement. In this study the principal method of conveying this type of information was narrative comment. Whilst this was often understood some parents were concerned that comments were overly positive or attempting to measure attitudes and skills that were not readily quantifiable, for example, respect. As a result some parents were less confident in the reliability of teachers' comments in these areas.

Plain language: The impact of format

Whilst most parents in the current study did not comment specifically on the format of the report, this aspect of the reporting process seemed to have an impact upon their understandings, such as confusion caused by dense text, complex tables and the codes used. Written reports have a key role in the communication of information to parents (The Practitioners Reporting Group, 2011). Ensuring that the format used for reporting enables information to be presented clearly is important if the written report is to fulfil this role and be understood.

There is no mandate for a single format for written reporting in New Zealand schools (Ministry of Education, 2010b) with schools being free to determine the appropriate presentation to use to meet the needs of their community. The consequence of this individualistic approach was evident in the current study from the analysis of the report formats with little commonality between them except in relation to National Standards reporting. Such a high degree of diversity may not be helpful (Kofoed, 2009). *Some* consistency in format could be useful in enabling parents to more readily follow the academic 'story' being told in the report as they would be accustomed to the layout and might be able to access relevant information more quickly (Reporting to Parents Taskforce, 2006). In addition,

greater consistency might facilitate parents' understandings of key terminology through repeated exposure and discussion over time.

The reporting format chosen also impacts on content, imposing challenges on teachers who must make decisions about what information to include when faced with small free text boxes. Decisions regarding content are also taken at a school wide level with some schools reporting across most of the curriculum areas with others focussing solely on reading, writing and mathematics. Recent Ministry of Education research stated that an increasingly high proportion of schools, as required, made direct reference to the National Standards in their reports (Ward & Thomas, 2012). This was also representative of the reports viewed in the current study in which parents received a large amount of often complex information about reading, writing and mathematics. Was this too much? How much information is enough? Providing parents with an overwhelming amount of information can be confusing (Power & Clark, 2000). Consideration needs to be given to providing *sufficient* information to be able to support their child without swamping them with detail. Parents from this study wanted to know about their child's current achievement, expressed in terms of points of reference that they could understand for example, age related levels. They wanted to know if this level of achievement was appropriate and what they could do to help close any gap/assist their child to improve. Ensuring that the child's achievements, progress and current position are reported along with what they need to do next would seem to be a good starting point (Kofoed, 2009).

Reporting as a Means of Building a Partnership Between Teachers and Parents

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, The Ministry of Education views written reporting as a means of creating and developing a learning focussed partnership between schools/teachers and parents. However, it does not 'flesh out' what this type of partnership might look like. It is stated that written reporting will provide parents with information that they can use to help their child with their learning (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the nature of partnership is complex and as such a comprehensive definition is elusive (Bastiani, 1993). Whilst parental involvement has a positive impact on

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student learning (Biddulph et al., 2003; Greenwood & Hickman, 1991) and communication between parents and schools encourages parents to become involved in their child's learning (Watkins, 1997), how partnership is enacted within schools and the 'type' of partnership appropriate for each parent differs.

The learning focussed approach to partnership identified by the Ministry of Education has been advocated as particularly useful (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). The success of this approach rests upon the development of an informed relationship where each party has clear roles and responsibilities, understands the dynamic nature of the relationship, the stakeholders are mutually accountable and power within the relationship is as equally distributed as possible (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a). Is this type of educative partnership parents are currently experiencing or, indeed, what they want in regard to reporting and supporting children in their learning?

There is a spectrum of parental involvement in children's learning (Colmar Brunton, 2012) influenced by differences in perception of responsibility for student learning, differing motivations for involvement (Watkins, 1997) and diverse levels of parental expertise and confidence (Epstein, 1986). In the current study all parents were keen to be involved in supporting their child in their learning, seemingly indicating that parents wished to have some sort of educative role. However, this does not imply that *all* parents will want to. Some may not wish to engage in an educative partnership (Kofoed, 2009) whilst others may prefer to be more fully involved for example, through working with their child at home. Unsurprisingly no single clear vision of a desired role emerged in the current study. Schools need to acknowledge the diverse levels of parental engagement, supporting parents to enable them to participate in as full a learning partnership as they wish/are able to.

When reporting it can be assumed that providing parents with information about the next steps or how to help at home is done with the intention of encouraging an educative partnership. Is supporting parents to develop partnership as straightforward as providing them with a written report containing 'next steps' and 'how to help' guidance? Provision of 'next steps' and 'how to help' information phrased in familiar language is one means of giving parents

information that they need to assist their child with their learning. However, in this study not all 'next steps' information was provided in accessible language, making it less likely that parents would be fully aware of the messages teachers were attempting to convey. Lack of confidence and knowledge of how to help has been identified by Epstein (1986) as a potential barrier to parental involvement in their child's learning. Meetings and information sheets can aid parental development of expertise (Ministry of Education, 2010c) but it is important to bear in mind that not all will be able or willing to attend meetings. It has been suggested that, as far as possible, reports should be able to stand alone as sources of information (Kofoed, 2009) and this clearly has merit as it simplifies the communication process. However, in light of diverse parental background and experience it seems unlikely that written reporting alone will be a means of creating and developing a partnership. In order for parents to be fully informed and as involved as they wish, a combination of the two approaches may be most effective.

Reporting needs to be honest, accurate and constructive (Marino et al., 2001; Timperley & Robinson, 2004). It was not within the scope of the current study to examine the accuracy of the information in the written reports reviewed. However, parents for the most part assumed that the information they were receiving was an honest and accurate reflection of their child's achievement and progress particularly if it confirmed what they already knew or thought. Teachers' judgements were only doubted if they did not align with parents' knowledge and experience of their child. It was also presumed that sound assessment measures and judgements underpinned the process and the information presented in the reports was assumed to be accurate. Parents were generally trusting in the teachers as being the experts. This perhaps reflects an acknowledgement of the differing roles within the relationship between teachers and parents (Power & Clark, 2000). It also signals what parents might presume their role to be in regards to a partnership. Whilst a level of mutual trust is an important factor in the development of a partnership relationship (Holowinsky, 1997; Timperley & Robinson, 2002a) unquestioning acceptance of the information being presented may hinder understanding and/or interpretation leaving parents less able to effectively support their child (Hattie, 2010).

The provision of accurate information is underpinned by teachers being able to make dependable judgements about the quality of student work (Sadler, 1987). Recent research suggests that this is not yet the case with significant variations in the reliability of overall teacher judgements regarding student achievement in relation to the National Standards (Thrupp, 2012). This calls into question whether parents' faith in the reliability and accuracy of the information they were presented with was fully justified. The provision of quality information to parents is essential for accountability as it provides a means through which progress towards the learning goals of the partnership can be determined (Robinson & Timperley, 2000). Without adequate, dependable information parents can only adopt a limited role within the partnership.

So is it realistic and viable for reporting children's progress and achievement to parents to be a means of building partnership? As outlined earlier in this Chapter, the Ministry of Education perspective is that clear, accurate reporting can form the 'basis' for parental partnership. It is stated that reports can give parents information that they can use to help their child with their learning (Ministry of Education, n.d.-b). While reports may be able to *contribute* to the development of partnerships it would seem unlikely that written reporting alone can achieve the development of a truly educative partnership. Reports are not able to fully meet the needs of all parents in terms of the information they wish to or need to receive in order to support their child's learning (Power & Clark, 2000). As evidence from this study would suggest, additional sources of information can be used to support parents in developing the knowledge and understanding that they need to support their children (The Practitioners Reporting Group, 2011) enabling them participate in the partnership as fully as they wish (Timperley & Robinson, 2002a).

Summary

Parental understanding of and ability to interpret their child's written school report is vital if the development of a *genuine* educative partnership between parents and schools is to take place. In the current study whilst parents had mostly grasped the 'big picture' in terms of their child's achievement and progress, understandings of the detail were often sketchy, suggesting that their experiences were unlikely to be reflective of a fully informed partnership. In the final chapter conclusions will be drawn and the implications for schools examined.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this Chapter the original research questions guiding the study are revisited and conclusions drawn based on the study findings. In addition implications for schools and teachers are identified and possible areas for future research suggested.

Conclusions

The first question considered in the study was:

How is student progress and achievement communicated to parents in a formal written report?

It can be concluded that schools used differing formats to report student progress and achievement to parents. There was little commonality in the reporting aside from the use of the National Standards to report student progress and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics. Schools reported a range of qualitative and quantitative data through the presentation of narrative comment and tables. However, the points of reference used on the written reports to indicate student progress and achievement varied across subjects and schools. Whilst schools appeared to be trying to give parents as full a picture as possible of their child's achievements in reading, writing and mathematics, most reports included little information on other subject areas or behaviour. Plain language reporting was not always evident as technical language was often included in the reports.

The second question addressed was:

What understandings do parents have regarding their child's achievement and progress as communicated to them through formal, written school reports?

Parents had a broad understanding of the messages conveyed in their child's written report, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. However, they were often unclear about the details, with aspects of the reports leading to superficial understanding, some confusion and occasionally misunderstanding. Reports

Conclusion

frequently contained positive messages that were consistent with parents' own understanding of their child's progress and achievement. Parents believed the information to be reliable and so the information presented was largely unquestioned. In addition, whilst the technical language and different points of reference used did not completely prevent parents from understanding the information being presented to them, it did not support them in developing a deep understanding of their child's progress and achievement or in developing a partnership with the teacher or school.

It can be concluded that despite schools and teachers putting a great deal of time and effort into producing written reports for parents, 'plain language' reporting in relation to the National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics is not necessarily giving parents quality information that they can readily understand.

As the evidence generated from this research suggests, the diverse reporting formats used and the categories and terms within them appear to be hindering rather than helping in terms of parental understanding of their child's written school report.

Implications

The Ministry of Education, in conjunction with schools and teachers, needs to consider whether greater commonality of format/points of reference used in written reporting might be useful. This could mean the use of a common format with common points of reference. What schools and communities would find most helpful needs to be further investigated.

In addition, if The Ministry of Education and schools wish to encourage partnership with parents and, more particularly, encourage an educative partnership then they need to consider what schools might do to more effectively support the development of partnerships. It might be the case that the development of educative partnerships is better served through the provision of support meetings at school through which parents can be both informed about key curriculum and assessment practice and also feel a sense of involvement and connection with the school. If partnership relies on the development of relationships then purposeful face to face communication may well be a more effective means of promoting the relationship than reliance on written communication.

Conclusion

Although small-scale in nature, this study makes a contribution to current thinking regarding reporting to parents, enabling the Ministry of Education, schools and teachers to consider the extent to which existing reporting practices support parental understanding of written reports.

Future research possibilities.

A limitation of this study was that parents had only received mid-year reports about their child's progress and achievement. It might be useful for future research to investigate parental understanding twice during the year as it may give a fuller picture of parents' understanding of their child's achievement and progress and of school systems as these may change between mid year and end of year reporting. It may also be helpful to involve schools and teachers in a further study to ascertain the intended messages of written reports.

Also, given the diversity in format of reports identified in this study it may be helpful to investigate reports from a wider sample of schools to further investigate trends and themes that might emerge.

Finally, investigating reporting practice and parents' understandings in a single school may provide additional insights into the issues surrounding written reporting and parental understanding and interpretation of reports.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A



Dear Principal,

My name is Rowena Pearson and I am a full time student at the University of Auckland in the Faculty of Education. I am completing a research based thesis for my Masters Degree in Education.

The research is to find out about parents' understanding of their child's progress and achievement as it is conveyed to them through their child's written school report.

I am seeking schools that would allow access to their site in order to identify parents of Years 3 or 4 children who would be willing to take part in an interview about their child's most recent school report. I have enclosed a Participant Information Sheet that gives further details of the project.

If you would be willing to allow access to your school and provide documentation about your reporting process please could you complete the slip below and return to me in the stamped addressed envelope enclosed. I will then contact you by phone to discuss the project further.

Yours sincerely,
Rowena Pearson

Contact details and approval wording:

Researcher:

Rowena Pearson can be contacted on [REDACTED] or by email at rpea047@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Dr Eleanor Hawe can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48733 or by email at e.hawe@auckland.ac.nz

Dr Helen Dixon can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48547 or by email at h.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

Head of School:

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 82974 or by email at c.rubie@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 3737599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

I am interested in providing access to the school and participating in this study.

Name: _____
School: _____
Phone: _____
Email: _____

Please return in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope by 22nd May 2012.

Appendix B



Principal and Board of Trustees Information Sheet

Research Project Title: Parental Understanding of School Reports

Researcher Name: Rowena Pearson, Master of Education student at the University of Auckland

Supervisors: Dr Eleanor Hawe, Dr Helen Dixon.

Project Description and Invitation

I am writing to seek permission to access your school site in order to conduct interviews with parents as part of a research project for my Master of Education degree at the University of Auckland.

The purpose of the research project is to explore parents' understanding of their child's achievement and progress as conveyed to them through formal school reporting processes. The focus will be specifically on written school reports. The parents involved must have children currently in Years 3 or 4 of the school.

Data Collection

1. Parents who are invited and agree to participate in the research will take part in a semi-structured interview about their child's written school report.
2. Participants will be asked to bring a copy of their child's most recent written report to the interview. They will be asked to ensure that any identifying information (child's name, teacher's name, school) is removed prior to sharing with me.
3. During the interview, parents' understanding of their child's progress and achievement will be explored. This interview will be recorded for later transcription by me and/or a professional transcriber. It is anticipated that each interview will take no longer than 45 minutes to complete. Parents may request that the voice recorder be paused or the interview ceased at any time. The interview transcript will then be analysed.
4. If, during the course of the interview the parent has any questions about the content of their child's written report they will be advised to consult their child's Class Teacher, the Deputy Principal or Principal of the school for advice.
5. Some background data will also be collected from the school including copies of reporting policies and procedures and report templates for the focus year groups.

Use of Data

I will analyse the data to answer my focus questions. It will be used to inform the writing of my thesis. The data may also be referred to in subsequent academic papers that I write or referred to in conference presentations.

Parents will not have access to the original data file or any copy but, if requested, can be sent a copy of the transcribed interview for review. If they wish to correct any information they may do so but requests for amendments will need to be made to me by the end of June 2012. If no such requests are made within the timeframe then it will be assumed that the parent has confirmed the accuracy of the transcript.

Appendices

Data Storage and Retention

Data from the parent interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and stored on the recorder's memory card and a password protected laptop. These digital recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and/or a transcriber. Data will be shared by me with my two supervisors. At the end of the project all data will be stored securely in my Main Supervisor's office at the University of Auckland for a period of six years after which it will be shredded or, in the case of digital audio recordings, will be deleted.

Right to Withdraw from Participation

Participants will be free to withdraw from the project at any time up until the 14th July 2012. At this time data analysis will begin and so from then on it will not be possible to withdraw data.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The researcher will endeavour to ensure that the confidentiality of parent and school participation is maintained.

It should be noted that due to the small number of participants from each school it may be possible for individuals to be identified by someone with knowledge of the school context. However, every endeavour will be made to ensure that their identities are protected. Parents and schools will not be identified in the final thesis and I will use pseudonyms for parents when writing up the thesis. Schools and parents will be asked to remove names from documentation prior to it being given to me.

Consent forms will only be accessed by me and my Main Supervisor. They will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the main Supervisor's office, separate from other documentation for a period of 6 years after which they will be destroyed.

Data will be confidential to me, my supervisors and the transcriber who will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Individual data will not be made available to the Principal, Board or School staff. However, upon request the school or parent participants may receive a summary of findings of the study. This will be emailed to them upon completion if a current email address has been provided on the consent form.

I would also like to seek confirmation from you that a parent's decision about their participation in the research is entirely voluntary. It will not impact upon their or their child's relationships with school staff in any way nor will it affect their achievement grades or levels.

If you have any questions regarding the above information my contact details and those of my supervisors are provided below.

If you wish to provide access to your school site in order for parents to be approached regarding participation and to provide documentation, please could you complete the slip attached to the covering letter and return to me in the enclosed stamped addressed envelope. I will then contact you to confirm whether or not your school has been selected to participate in the study.

Contact details and approval wording:

Researcher:

Rowena Pearson can be contacted on [REDACTED] or by email at rpea047@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Supervisors:

Dr Eleanor Hawe can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48733 or by email at e.hawe@auckland.ac.nz

Dr Helen Dixon can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48547 or by email at h.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

Head of School:

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 82974 or by email at c.rubie@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 3737599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

Appendix C



Consent Form

Principal and Board of Trustees
This form will be held for six years.

Name of Participating School _____

Name of Researcher: Rowena Pearson

Names of Supervisors: Dr Eleanor Hawe, Dr Helen Dixon

Research Project Title: Parental Understanding of School Reports

I have read the participant information sheet. Details of the research project have been fully explained to me including the digital recording of interviews with participants, transcription, confidentiality, data use, storage and destruction. I have understood the nature of this research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and have them answered satisfactorily. I understand that participation in the project is voluntary.

- I consent to the researcher having access to the school site in order to approach potential research participants from the school's parent community and conduct interviews with them.
- I give my assurance that a parent's decision to participate or not will not impact upon their or their child's relationships with school staff in any way and it will not affect their child's achievement grades.
- I understand that, whilst the researcher will endeavour to maintain the confidentiality of school and parent participation, as only a small number of parents will be participating it is possible that their identities may not remain confidential.
- I understand that parent participants will be asked to remove all identifying names from the documentation they provide prior to the researcher gaining access to it.
- I agree to provide the researcher with copies of reporting policies and procedures and report templates for the focus year groups.
- I understand that neither the name of the school nor the parent's names will be used in the researcher's thesis.
- I understand that participants are free to withdraw participation at any time without explanation and that they may withdraw any data supplied up to the 14th July 2012.
- I understand that individual participant data will only be available to the researcher and her supervisors. It will not be made available to the Principal or Board of Trustees.
- I wish to receive an electronic copy of the findings of the study by email Yes No
Email address _____

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS
ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

Appendix D

Parents...

**Would you like the opportunity to discuss
your child's school report?**

I am a full time student at the University of Auckland in the Faculty of Education. I am completing a research based thesis for my Masters Degree in Education. I am trying to find out about parental understanding of their child's progress and achievement as it is explained to them in their child's written report.

I am seeking parents of primary school age (Years 1-6) children who would be willing to take part in an interview about their child's most recent school report.

If you would be interested in taking part in this research please contact me for further information.

Rowena Pearson

Tel: [REDACTED] **Email:** rpea047@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Dr Eleanor Hawe can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48733 or by email at e.hawe@auckland.ac.nz

Dr Helen Dixon can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48547 or by email at h.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

Head of School:

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 82974 or by email at c.rubie@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 3737599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE
ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012 /8018

Appendix E



**Participant Information Sheet.
Parents.**

Research Project Title: Parental Understanding of School Reports

Researcher: My name is Rowena Pearson and I am a full time student at the University of Auckland in the Faculty of Education. I am completing a research based thesis for my Masters Degree in Education.

Project description and Invitation:

The purpose of the research project is to find out about parents' understanding of their child's achievement and progress as it has been explained to them through formal school reporting processes. The research will focus specifically on written school reports given to the parents of primary school students.

I would like to invite you to participate in this research project as you have a child who is currently at primary school.

I would like to confirm that any information you provide will be treated as confidential. It will be seen by myself and my University Supervisors but will not be made available to the school.

Data Collection

If you agree to participate I would like you to bring a copy of your child's most recent written report to an individual interview. You will need to ensure that names of your child, their teacher and the school are removed before you leave this with me.

Your child's report will be discussed with you as part of an individual interview which will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. It is expected that the interview will take no longer than 45 minutes. During the interview you can ask for the recording to be paused at any time or for the interview to cease. If, during the course of the interview you have any questions about the content of your child's written report you can follow up by consulting your child's Class Teacher, the Deputy Principal or Principal.

Data use and storage

The information that you provide will be analysed and used as part of my thesis. It may, in the future, be referred to in further academic papers or conference presentations.

The interview will be stored on the voice recorder's memory card and a password protected laptop. These digital recordings will be transcribed by myself and/or a transcriber. I will share the data with my two supervisors. You will not have access to the digitally recorded interview, however, you may request a copy of the transcribed interview. If there are any parts you feel are inaccurate you can request that they are amended or removed. Requests for amendment or removal need to be made by 25th August 2012. If no request is made by this time it will be assumed that you confirm the accuracy of the transcript.

Appendices

At the end of the project all data will be stored securely in my Main Supervisor's office at the University of Auckland for a period of six years after which it will be shredded or, in the case of digital audio recordings, will be deleted.

Withdrawing from the Project

You will be free to withdraw from the project at any time up until the 30th August 2012. At this time I will begin data analysis and so from then on it will not be possible to withdraw data.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

The information that you provide me will be treated as confidential to me and my Supervisors.

The following steps will be taken to protect your privacy:

- You will be asked to remove all names from your child's report before you give it to me.
- Neither you nor the school will be identified by name in the thesis – pseudonyms will be used instead.
- If the information you provide is reported or published it will be done in a way that does not identify you as its source.
- Your recorded interview and transcript will only be accessed by me, my University Supervisors and a transcriber. The transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement agreeing not to share or discuss the interview or transcript.
- Consent forms will be stored separately from other data and access to these will only be available to me and my Main Supervisor. They will be held securely in my Main Supervisor's office at the University for six years after which they will be destroyed.

I will try to ensure the confidentiality of your participation. However, as only a few parents will participate it is possible that someone who knows the school setting may be able to identify you.

If you wish to receive a summary of the findings of the study it will be emailed to you upon completion. You will need to include a current email address on the consent form for this to be sent to.

If you have any questions regarding the above information contact details for the researcher and her supervisors are provided below.

If you wish to participate in the research please could you sign the attached consent form. I am also providing a Participant Information Sheet and Assent Form for your child. Please could you discuss them with your child and, if they are happy to do so, ask them to sign the Assent Form.

Contact details and approval wording:

Researcher:

Rowena Pearson can be contacted on [REDACTED] or by email at rpea047@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Supervisor:

Dr Eleanor Hawe can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48733 or by email at e.hawe@auckland.ac.nz

Dr Helen Dixon can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48547 or by email at h.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

Head of School:

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 82974 or by email at c.rubie@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 3737599 extn. 87830/83761. Email:

humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

Appendix F



**Consent Form
Parent Participants
This form will be held for six years.**

Name of Researcher: Rowena Pearson

Names of Supervisors: Dr Eleanor Hawe, Dr Helen Dixon

Research Project Title: Parental Understanding of School Reports

I have read the Participant Information Sheet, have understood the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction.

- I agree to take part in this research.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw participation at any time, without explanation. I understand that I am free to withdraw any data traceable to me up to the 30th August 2012.
- I agree to be digitally recorded during my interview and understand that I may ask for the voice recorder to be switched off at any time, or for the interview to cease.
- I understand that a transcriber who has signed a confidentiality agreement will support the researcher in transcribing the recording.
- I agree to give the researcher a copy of my child's most recent written report. I will remove all names from it before I give it to the researcher.
- I understand that, whilst the researcher will try to maintain the confidentiality of my participation, as only a small number of parents will be participating it is possible that my identity may not remain confidential.
- I understand that neither the name of the school nor the parent's names will be used in the researcher's thesis.
- I understand that individual participant data will only be available to the researcher and her supervisors.
- I understand that data will be kept securely for six years. After this they will be deleted or destroyed.
- I wish to receive an electronic copy of the findings of the study by email. Yes No
- I wish to receive a copy of my transcribed interview for review. Yes No
- I understand that if I would like amendments or deletions to be made to the transcript I must make a request for correction by 25th August 2012. I understand that if I have not requested amendments by this time the researcher will assume that I confirm the accuracy of the transcript.

Email address _____

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

Appendix G



Student Information Sheet

My name is Rowena Pearson and I am a student at the University of Auckland. My Supervisors (Teachers) at the University are Dr Eleanor Hawe and Dr Helen Dixon.

I am doing a project to find out about parents' understanding of school reports. Your parents have said that they would like to take part and would like to speak to me about your report.

What will happen?

Your parents will bring a copy of your report when they come to talk to me. Your name will be crossed out. When they have talked to me they will leave the report with me. I will use this later on to help me remember and think about what they have said. When my project is finished I will write about what I find out. I will not use your or your parents' names in my writing.

Who will see your report?

I will see your report and my Supervisors, Dr Hawe and Dr Dixon will see it as well.

What will happen to your report?

At the end of the project all of the information that I have collected will be put in a locked drawer in Dr Hawe's office and will be kept safely for six years just in case it needs to be checked. After that it will be shredded.

Do parents have to take part?

No, and if you don't want them to show me your report that's okay.

If you are happy for your parents to show me your report and leave me a copy of it please could you sign the "Student Assent Form".

Contact details and approval wording:

Researcher:

Rowena Pearson can be contacted on [REDACTED] or by email at rpea047@aucklanduni.ac.nz

Supervisors:

Dr Eleanor Hawe can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48733 or by email at e.hawe@auckland.ac.nz

Dr Helen Dixon can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 48547 or by email at h.dixon@auckland.ac.nz

Head of School:

Associate Professor Christine Rubie-Davies can be contacted at the University of Auckland on 09 623 8899 ext 82974 or by email at c.rubie@auckland.ac.nz

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 3737599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

Appendix H



Student Assent Form

I have read Mrs Pearson's information sheet and I have talked to my parents about it.

- It is okay for my parents to show Mrs Pearson my report.
- I understand that they will leave a copy of my report with her but my name will be crossed out.
- I understand that Mrs Pearson will not use my name or my parents' names in her writing.

Signed _____

Date _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 12th April 2012 for (3) years, Reference Number 2012/8018

Appendix I

Parent Interview with _____

At _____ Date: _____

Assent Form Y/N Verbal	
Review consent form points Consent form Y/N	
School Name: _____ Area: _____ Decile: _____ Child's Year Group: _____ Age: _____ Any other school age children: _____	<u>Prompts</u>
How does the school report to you about your child's progress and achievement?	Tell me about....
When do you receive written reports about your child's progress and achievement?	Can you give an example...?
Tell me about the most recent written report that you received about your child?	Can you say more about this...?
What curriculum areas does the report tell you about?	I'm not sure about
Can we look at what the report tells you about your child's reading/writing/maths/other areas?	How useful did you find....
How informative did you find reporting in relation to national literacy and numeracy standards?	Why.?
Did the report identify any ways that you can help your child at home?	
How do you think your child is progressing in reading/writing/maths?	
Was the information in the report what you wanted to know? If not, what else would you like to know?	
What parts of the report did you find easy to understand? Why?	
Was there anything about the report that you found difficult to understand? Why?	
What other information do you receive from the school about your child's progress and achievement?	
Is there anything you would like to add?	

Appendix J

Extracts from coded transcripts

school.

Interviewer
Can you just maybe give me some examples from the report of things that told you about progress?

Eliza
I mean, I find the reports to be, I don't know that I can see progress in the report. It seems to be very generic, it's not really knuckling down on any one thing, it is very broad and very basic. It's not, I would like more. I would like, I guess more of an understanding of it. Like I'd love to know what instructional level 11 to 12.5 is cause I don't know. Yeah I'm not that ... I don't really know quite how to answer that one.

PARENT UNDERST. OF PROGRESS
can't see generic broad/basic
P. of Ref
doesn't understand instruct. level

Interviewer
Was the information in the report what you wanted to know?

Eliza
No.

parent wants more info

Interviewer
What else do you think you would like to know?

Eliza
I would like to know his exact reading level, like within his age group, what is his age group and where is he at in that one. In the writing we get the spelling, we get the age level, which helps me. I have a better understanding of that because I think well he's nine, he's got 9.8 years okay, so we are doing okay. I would like that to be in each department of the report, definitely. Yeah, I mean I guess it's just a little bit more like that, yeah. Just more where his age level is at with what he's doing. And also it's, the comments at the end, I mean it's all good stuff, I'm sure there's something in there that, you know, they're happy, they're lovely, they're good, they're doing well, they enjoy doing this, they enjoy doing that but I'm sure there's aspects that happen every day at school with him that we as a parent could turn around and say well no that's not okay, you need to stop doing that, but you don't, I mean I don't believe that in general comments is how he is every day, just a happy, lovely, go free kid that doesn't have something at school that he does that just irritates the teacher or is improper, so yeah.

PARENT WANTS TO KNOW:
- wants to know rd. level.
- understand spell age.
- given in yrs comments behaviour
- happy
- enjoys it
- mismatch with parent know
- wants to support child.
tch.

Eliza

4

Appendices

Lara

Interviewer

How does your child's school report to you about his progress and achievement?

Response

Through reports receiving reports and this one before us is his half year report and through parent teacher interviews, that's about all I believe.

TIMING + COMMUNICATION

- half yr report
- par/tch interviews

Interviewer

When do you receive the written reports about his progress and achievement?

Response

With Damien having been there since August last year we received an end of year and we received this half year so I would imagine that it's two a year, but I'm not sure if that changes as he gets older.

TIMING

- end of yr.
- 1/2 yr
- uncertain

Interviewer

Can you tell me about his most recent written report, what curriculum areas does it tell you about?

Response

Reading, writing, mathematics. It breaks down English into speaking and listening and it does cover other subjects which in this instance covers topics like social studies, science, technology and health. It talks about attitude and interest in use of ICT, attitude and interest in participation in the arts and also physical education. So quite a big range.

CONTENT

- Re
- Wr
- ma
- s & h. Others
- Soc studies
- Science
- technol.
- health
- ICT - attitude
- interest
- participation

range of subjects

Interviewer

Can we look at what the report tells you first of all about his reading?

Response

Yeah, I think um yeah it was interesting to me because the reading and writing are sort of in their own categories and they don't sort of fall under you know the measure that they've done for the other categories, so with his English it just tells me about what he's achieving, like he can identify his alphabet letters and the corresponding sounds. It talks about developing his knowledge of punctuation. It gives you really specifics around his, you know, he can identify more than 50 basic words etc. but what it doesn't sort of give is a measure in terms of how he might be doing in a National Standard so yeah his reading one, oh I beg your pardon, it says here it's below expectations. I didn't pick that up. Mm, there's a comment there that I did not pick up, how interesting. So it seems that there's a different measure here that I haven't picked up over here because that gives it an ABC, that one is a comment on the page, that's concerning. That wasn't even picked up at his parent teacher interview when we talked about it, it wasn't mentioned.

Achievement

- how are they measured?

- tells what child achieving UNDERSTANDING - doesn't say in reln. to Natl St.

points of achievement measurement

Not mentioned at p/t interview

ACTUALLY DOES. PARENT NOTICES WAY OF SHOWING ACHIEVEMENT. - grade - comment.

Jasmine
 Yeah. So um they've highlighted the levels that Edina's age group should be at, National Standards, and um that's what the bold area is around here and the ticks is where Edina is actually at and it's really good cause February they tell us she's at level 22 where she should be for her age. April she moved up to 23 and now at June she's now at 25. And then they tell me about what, how to support her and that's where the summary of the progress, next learning steps and home support. What I need to do as mum at home.

shakes prob

Pof Ref
 - level for age
 - Nat st.
 - bold
 - ticks show ach.
 - read level (numerical not age related)
 - progress
 How to help:
 - next st.
 - home supp.

Interviewer
 What about her writing?

Jasmine
 Basically the same. Same steps where Edina's age group should be, where she is at, um at each time, February, April, June and then what I can do to help her to increase levels.

wants to help improve

assessment - historic + current

same for writing and maths
 - where child should be, achievement, progress, how to help.

Interviewer
 And what about her maths?

Jasmine
 Exactly the same as the previous ones.

Interviewer
 Okay. How informative did you find the reporting in relation to the national literacy and numeracy standards?

Jasmine
 Um, to be honest, I am a naïve ignorant mum, sorry in terms of that sort of stuff. So basically the more simple it is for me the better. I don't really ask too much, I just ask about where should she be and is she meeting that and what can I do to help her. So I don't really ask for anything more. I'm more um worried about her social activities as well, how she interacts with other kids too, so. Did I answer that at all?

wants simple info

TRUST.
 - acknowl.
 - does not know
 - wants to know where should be.
 - social / interactions
 - what parent can do to help

Interviewer
 Yeah. Now you talked about it identifying ways that you could help your child in the home. How useful did you find that?

Jasmine
 Really good because um sometimes as parents we think just reading a book is enough, but then um if you have a look in here it's telling me I need to question her a bit, question marks why was that there. I mean just getting a bit more in-depth with her reading, not just ... and I see the difference. It's really helpful cause I'm like what's that, it's comma, why is it there and she'll explain it to me. So it's not just boring old read, read, read. Found it really helpful in everything.

How to help.
 - gives more guidance.
 - helpful.
 - reading book not enough - question
 - understands difference.
 - examples: comma question marks

Jasmine

Emily
 Mmm. So the reading, so I did find this quite hard to interpret the first time I saw National Standards, but if I have a look. So Carrie is in year four and I can see the National Standard is between sort of level two, 28 point, no I don't know what that ... 28.5 between and point 95 and I can see Carrie is above National Standard because it's highlighted in yellow. But that, it's good that it's given me an indication that she is above the National Standard but it doesn't give me any indication of what makes her above National Standard or what other areas she needs to improve on. So that's reading.

Interviewer
 So does the other report, because you've got the second report as well, does that, what information does that give you about reading?

Emily
 Yeah, that definitely gives me a bit more. So I can see here it's given me some commentary and it tells me a little bit more about how Carrie is doing on her reading, like she's reading carefully to gain meaning um and learning to infer meaning when everything it's not spelt out. So that has given me a little bit more. From my preference I also, one of the key things that I think needs to be done is that they need to improve on letting us know what we should be working on, so looking forward rather than just looking at a point in time, to always develop further.

Interviewer
 Okay. And what about writing, what do her reports tell you about her writing?

Emily
 So again writing I've got the National Standards and I can see a comparison between what, how she was at the beginning of the year and how she is mid-year. And it shows me that she's at National Standard, um but without then referring to the school report I can't see what makes her National Standard. So I can't see what is National Standard and what exactly she has achieved or again what she needs to concentrate on or work to improve herself further. Um, where is, so writing it says she's learning to consistently work on feedback and success and what she's working on at this point in time. Um.

Interviewer
 Can I just check again, when do these come out? Do they come out at the same time or separate?

Emily
 It comes out all together. So the National Standard with this school report comes out all together.

Interviewer
 Sorry I just wasn't clear about whether they came together or at different points. What do the reports tell you about her maths?

Emily

Handwritten notes:
 Pot level + Number level confusion reading
 highlighting clear
 Parent Under child in 44 reading level
 ① reading level given.
 - highlight where child is at.
 - tells above Natl st.
 No indication of how to improve or why above N.S.
 More information
 ② Narrative - more detailed
 - wants to know more about what to do next. Looking forward.
 Natl standards
 Progress
 ① comparison shows where she is but not what makes her Natl st.
 ② school rep. more info. Doesn't show what needs to achieve / has achieved
 both sent together.

Appendix K

Melanie		Magpie School		Report to show Progress towards the National Standards	
Format + Content	Points of Ref Used	Writing	Maths	General	Other
<p>Content - reading, writing, maths, oral language, Health & PE Integrated Units (social sci, sci, technology) The Arts.</p> <p>Format - mainly narrative with tickle box to show progress towards Nat Standards.</p>	<p>No statistical data given</p> <p>- making required progress towards meeting the National Standards</p> <p>- With accelerated progression meet the National Standard</p> <p>Effort grading/rating given: Excellent across Reading, writing and maths Attendance/ punctuality reported</p>	<p>Narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enjoys writing - focussed - complete writing tasks - uses approp text features when writing - Not editing + revising for sense + punctuation - includes lots of ideas - beginning to expand on main idea <p>Progress - tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>	<p>Narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - able to use several ways of solving problems + explain thinking - working with numbers up to 100 - able to recall x facts quickly - using to help solve problems - learning to solve probs like 30 x 3 using pv - continues effectively during group lessons <p>Progress - tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>	<p>Narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - positive role model - leadership positions during group tasks - capable Class ambassador - Needs to prioritise focus on learning in class + school wide activities <p>Attendance/punctuality reported</p>	<p>Key competencies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> managing self, follows instructions, acceptable work presentation, looks after own + others property Relating to others: Takes responsibility for own behaviour, respects + includes others, is honest + trustworthy in relationships Participating + contributing works well (co-operatively in groups) Readily shares ideas comes out tasks responsibly Ratings given: consistently, usually, needs developing
<p>Language</p>	<p>Narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - enthusiastic reader - makes connections betw prior knowl + into in story - fluent, enjoys reading about unfamiliar words - not reading around unfamiliar words - evaluates words for prediction - reads indep - can locate answers <p>Progress - Tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>	<p>Progress - tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>	<p>Progress - tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>	<p>Progress - tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>	<p>Progress - tickle box</p> <p>Achievement - no statistical data reported</p>
<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>- continue to read for enjoyment in spare time</p> <p>- evaluate whether prediction of unfamiliar words fit context</p> <p>- continue to read between lines + use clues from story to develop deeper understand</p>	<p>- independent edit + revise writing to make sure it makes sense</p> <p>- organising ideas into paragraphs</p> <p>- forming upper + lowercase letters</p> <p>- not adding capitals through a sentence</p> <p>- add interesting words</p>	<p>- continue learning x tables to develop acc + speed</p> <p>- continue to use pv strats</p> <p>- write out a number sentence for word problems</p>	<p>- continue learning x tables to develop acc + speed</p> <p>- continue to use pv strats</p> <p>- write out a number sentence for word problems</p>	<p>- continue learning x tables to develop acc + speed</p> <p>- continue to use pv strats</p> <p>- write out a number sentence for word problems</p>
<p>How to Help</p>	<p>Not identified</p>	<p>Not identified</p>	<p>Not identified</p>	<p>Not identified</p>	<p>Not identified</p>

Eliza		Swift School		Type of Report: Interim Progress	
Format & content	Points of Ref Used	within Natl Standard	General:	Maths	Other
Reading - writing marks RE general Narrative comments some bullet points	Reading: Expected level (Natl Curric) Instructional reading level - not expressed as a year Writing - Expected level (N.C) within Natl St. Spelling - age in years Maths - Expected level (N.C) within Natl St. Other - None	within Natl Standard within Natl St. within Natl St.	- comments positive - enjoys - capable - gaining confidence - always willing to share at working towards mathematical solution. Row for attendance not filled in.	No level given within NS - gaining confidence - increased understanding of strategies - can sort, create and identify parts of 2D + 3D shapes & transform - gained knowl. of measuring the metric measures of capacity + volume	Religious Ed - topics covered - enjoyment - thoughtful - considerate
Language	Instructional level (age) Expected level (N.C level) - no explanation of terms within Natl St. - enjoy reading - adhere to meanings - reconstructing information - inferring meaning - deduce meaning complex language - tech. focused	No level given. Within N.C. - capable - good record - expanding content - additional comments to reader - personal thoughts - select words & phrs - consistent with topic - subject specific phrases - consistent with topic/purpose - punctuating sentences correctly spelling age	Writing No specific maths level given progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet points - strategies to solve 2 + 3 digit subtraction - ways to find fraction - off set using x + - facts Generic comment given - report is for a boy spend \$10 \$100, \$1000	Maths No specific maths level given progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet points - strategies to solve 2 + 3 digit subtraction - ways to find fraction - off set using x + - facts Generic comment given - report is for a boy spend \$10 \$100, \$1000	other Religious Ed - topics covered - enjoyment - thoughtful - considerate
Progress / Achievement	Instructional reading level given - No indication of progress - achievement given - Narrative comment identifies aspects - fluent reader Bullet points - determine meaning of unknown words - deduce meaning of unknown words	No writing level given spelling age given Narrative comment what he can do - No indication of progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet point - paragraphing - connective words / phrases	Writing No writing level given spelling age given Narrative comment what he can do - No indication of progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet point - paragraphing - connective words / phrases	Maths No specific maths level given progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet points - strategies to solve 2 + 3 digit subtraction - ways to find fraction - off set using x + - facts Generic comment given - report is for a boy spend \$10 \$100, \$1000	other Religious Ed - topics covered - enjoyment - thoughtful - considerate
Next steps	Instructional reading level given - No indication of progress - achievement given - Narrative comment identifies aspects - fluent reader Bullet points - determine meaning of unknown words - deduce meaning of unknown words	No writing level given spelling age given Narrative comment what he can do - No indication of progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet point - paragraphing - connective words / phrases	Writing No writing level given spelling age given Narrative comment what he can do - No indication of progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet point - paragraphing - connective words / phrases	Maths No specific maths level given progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet points - strategies to solve 2 + 3 digit subtraction - ways to find fraction - off set using x + - facts Generic comment given - report is for a boy spend \$10 \$100, \$1000	other Religious Ed - topics covered - enjoyment - thoughtful - considerate
How to help	Instructional reading level given - No indication of progress - achievement given - Narrative comment identifies aspects - fluent reader Bullet points - determine meaning of unknown words - deduce meaning of unknown words	No writing level given spelling age given Narrative comment what he can do - No indication of progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet point - paragraphing - connective words / phrases	Writing No writing level given spelling age given Narrative comment what he can do - No indication of progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet point - paragraphing - connective words / phrases	Maths No specific maths level given progress Narrative lists what he can do Bullet points - strategies to solve 2 + 3 digit subtraction - ways to find fraction - off set using x + - facts Generic comment given - report is for a boy spend \$10 \$100, \$1000	other Religious Ed - topics covered - enjoyment - thoughtful - considerate

Holly		Pelican School		Mid Year Report	
Format + Content	Points of Ref used:			General	
Explanatory sheet: Progress Prediction Sheet. Progressions of Learning Sheets for reading, writing, maths with goals for year identified.	Reading: National standards referred to Reading level: Colour wheel grading \pm above or at standard Writing: National standard referred to National Curriculum level Maths: National standard referred to Numeracy Stage + curriculum level. on prediction sheet as referred to + curriculum level.			No general comment	
	Reading	Writing	Maths	Other	
Language	Prediction sheet indicates child working above standard 10-11 yrs highlighted on goals sheet.	Prediction sheet - above standard Points within 1-2 highlighted on goal sheet	Prediction sheet - at standard. Points within 1-5 level 2 highlighted.	No other curriculum areas reported.	
Progress/Achievement	Achievement identified as above standard. Progress - 'at her current rate of progress ...'		Achievement identified as at standard.		
Next steps	Goal sheet includes ticks + highlighting - not clear which are goals. - understand + interpret maps, time tables, graph diagrams, - decode text fluently + accurately locate + summarise ideas	Highlighted - Begin to plan my writing + organise ideas. Ticked - Keep my writing relevant - ie read + check my writing as I'm doing it - punctuate more accurately consistently.	Highlighted - Use basic addition facts to help solve problems with numbers.		
How to Help.	None recorded.	None recorded	- helping year child to be confident with the addition facts & learn x facts beginning with 2x 5x 10x - use flash cards to play games with these	- discussing number problems in real life situations through a discussion trail.	

Carla		Stork School		Mid Year Report		
Format & Content		Points of Ref Used		General		
<p>Subject areas: Reading, Writing, Maths, RE.</p> <p>short statements in chart form with grading - consistently, usually, developing.</p>	<p>Curriculum levels - Writing & Maths. Levels qualified by B (beginning), M (middle), E (end) - Explanation provided on report cover.</p> <p>Reading age.</p> <p>NS - working towards standard - all areas.</p>	<p>descriptors ticked to show if achieved a how frequently/consistently.</p>	<p>2-8 word descriptors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude & effort - shows understanding of concepts taught - Able to select appropriate equipment to solve problems - explain mathematical processes - calculates accurately - Recalls basic facts accurately <p>Achievement - Curriculum Level.</p> <p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>	<p>2-5 word descriptors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude & effort - presents ideas clearly & sequentially - uses correct punctuation - expresses ideas creatively - proof reads & edits writing - spells accurately <p>Achievement - Curriculum Level.</p> <p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>	<p>3-4 word descriptors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude & effort - uses a variety of skills to check reading accuracy - identifies & retrieves info. - uses library & info skills <p>Achievement - reading age given.</p> <p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>	<p>3-9 word descriptors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attitude & effort - uses a variety of skills to check reading accuracy - identifies & retrieves info. - uses library & info skills <p>Achievement - reading age given.</p> <p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>
<p>language</p>	<p>Reading</p>	<p>Writing</p>	<p>Maths</p>	<p>Other</p>	<p>Religious Ed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3-7 word descriptors Contrib. to class discus responds positively to class activities participates in class prayer participates in school liturgies demonstrates knowl of RE programme. <p>Also narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsible/caring - thoughtful - assists + incl. others. - shows love, care & compassion - good understanding of School's core values. 	
<p>Progress/Achievement</p>	<p>Progress/Achievement</p>	<p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>	<p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>	<p>Progress - not mentioned.</p>	<p>Also narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsible/caring - thoughtful - assists + incl. others. - shows love, care & compassion - good understanding of School's core values. 	
<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Next Steps</p>	<p>Use a capital letter to show when a sentence begins + a full stop to show when it ends.</p> <p>Use a variety of ways to start a sentence.</p>	<p>count forwards & backwards from numbers between one & one hundred.</p> <p>knows groupings that make numbers to 10.</p>	<p>Not on report.</p>	<p>Also narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsible/caring - thoughtful - assists + incl. others. - shows love, care & compassion - good understanding of School's core values. 	
<p>How to Help</p>	<p>How to Help</p>	<p>Not on report.</p>	<p>Not on report.</p>	<p>Not on report.</p>	<p>Also narrative comment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - responsible/caring - thoughtful - assists + incl. others. - shows love, care & compassion - good understanding of School's core values. 	

Appendices

Appendix L

Examples of Report Formats

Mallard School Report Format

	Comment	Expectation			
		Above	At	Below	Well Below
LISTENING AND SPEAKING Effort					
WRITTEN LANGUAGE Effort					
<i>Next Learning Steps</i>					
<i>How you can help at home</i>					
READING Effort					
<i>Next Learning Steps</i>					
<i>How you can help at home</i>					
MATHEMATICS Effort					
<i>Next Learning Steps</i>					
<i>How you can help at home</i>					
Unit Studies Effort					
Physical Education and Health Effort					
The Arts Effort					
General Comments					
Attendance	Excellent	Satisfactory	Of Concern	Half days absent	

Class Teacher _____

Principal _____

Swift School Report Format

<p>READING Expected Level:</p>	<p>Working</p>	<p>the National Standard for reading.</p>
<p>Reading general comment: Instructional level</p>		
<p>Next learning steps:</p>		
<p>WRITING Expected Level:</p>	<p>Working</p>	<p>the National Standard for writing.</p>
<p>Writing general comment:</p>		
<p>Next learning steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 		
<p>MATHEMATICS Expected Level: ;</p>	<p>Working</p>	<p>the National Standard for mathematics.</p>
<p>Maths general comment:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ▪ ▪ 		
<p>How you can help at home:</p>		

Appendices

Religious Education & Special Character:	
<i>[Faint handwritten text]</i>	
General Comments:	
<i>[Faint handwritten text]</i>	
Attendance: Term One:	Term Two:

Stork School Report Format

Name:	Year		
	Consistently	Usually	Developing
Religious Education			
Contributes to class discussion			
Responds positively to class activities			
Participates in class prayer			
Participates in school liturgies			
Demonstrates knowledge of the Religious Education Programme			
Religious Education/Mercy Values: Respect, Compassion, Love, Hope, Forgiveness, Justice, Integrity/Honesty			
Attendance: _____ Punctuality: _____ Student: _____ Teacher: _____ Principal: _____			

Reading	Consistently			Usually			Developing		
	Reading Age:								
Working Standard									
Attitude and effort									
Uses a variety of skills to check reading accuracy									
Identifies and retrieves information									
Uses library and information skills									
Next Steps:	_____ _____								
Writing									
Curriculum Level:									
Working Standard									
Attitude and effort									
Presents ideas clearly and sequentially									
Uses correct punctuation									
Expresses ideas creatively									
Proof reads and edits writing									
Spells accurately									
Next Steps:	_____ _____								

Mathematics	Consistently			Usually		
	Curriculum Level:					
Working Standard						
Attitude and effort						
Shows understanding of concepts taught						
Able to select appropriate equipment to solve problems						
Explains mathematical processes						
Calculates accurately						
Recalls basic facts accurately						
Next Steps:	_____ _____					
General Comment:						