

# NATIONAL STANDARDS FACTSHEET

July 2010

## Reporting in plain language

Plain language reports can help build strong partnerships between schools and parents, families and whānau. When parents have good information about their child's achievement and progress, it can encourage them to play a greater role their children's learning.

Reports should be easily understood, outline a child's progress and achievement, and be free from educational jargon. Benefits of plain language reporting include:

- helping understand where the student is at and where they need to be
- giving parents, families and whānau confidence when talking to the school about progress and achievement
- building more effective home-school relationships that help students reach their learning goals.

## Tips for reporting in plain language

Consultation feedback on school reports has shown that parents, families and whānau think it is important to receive information about their child's strengths, progress and achievements in all curriculum areas, as well as areas for improvement. They also want to know early on if there are any problems, and what they can do to help. When writing reports, the feedback suggested:

- Be clear and accurate
- Keep the focus on a student's future learning goals and the steps needed to get there
- The simpler you can make it the better.

## Supporting teachers to report in plain language

Schools should find out what 'plain language' means to their school community. Making reporting clear and simple could include:

- asking parents, families and whānau to review sample reports
- developing a shared understanding of plain language reporting between teachers
- identifying exemplars of plain language reports for discussion with colleagues
- including student participation in the reporting process (student-led conferences) to help keep the language simple and easy to understand
- using advice and guidance from school leaders to support consistency in reporting across the school.

## Tips for writing in plain language

- Use language that is familiar and easy for all students, parents, family and whānau to understand
- Avoid jargon where possible. If you feel there are terms that parents, families and whānau need to know, then explain what they mean every time
- Keep words, sentences and paragraphs short and simple
- Leave out anything that is not relevant to the student or their parents, family and whānau
- Encourage student comments in reports
- Use a summary sentence to get to the point first, then explain in more detail
- When explaining a learning process, use actual examples where practical

- For assessment results – give clear final results and ensure parents, family and whānau understand what it means in terms of their child's learning. It helps having the student convey the detail
- Use bullet points for clarity
- Be personal: use 'I', 'my', 'their', 'her/he', 'you'.

## Find out what parents, families and whānau think

Every school's community has different wants and needs. It is important to find out what works for them. Feedback has shown that parents, family and whānau like to be asked what they think.

Some suggested topics for consulting are:

### 1. Reporting practices

Find out what parents, family and whānau think about the school's reporting timeline and practices. This consultation could be done by newsletter, a questionnaire, at an open meeting with interested parents, families and whānau or through a board or PTA meeting.

### 2. Plain language reporting

Different communities have different ideas on what 'plain language' means. You could find out:

- questions that are frequently asked by parents, families and whānau about reporting
- areas that need to be explained more clearly or replaced
- visual elements that may support the written reports (samples of students' work, graphs, images)
- the need for a glossary or an explanation sheet. It is a good idea to ask a parent to check they are clear and easy to understand.

### 3. Means of communication

There are many different ways of communicating with parents, families and whānau about their children's learning. Find out which methods are the best for your parents, families and whānau:

- face-to-face, so that any queries are answered straight away
- written or spoken in languages other than English
- read aloud by the teacher or student (for those who don't read well, or whose first language is not English)
- part of regular informal catch-ups
- supported via regular (e.g., monthly or fortnightly) emails, phone calls or texts.

### 4. Parent-teacher-student meetings

Find out from parents, families and whānau how meetings work best for them:

- how often
- what time of day
- the length of the meeting.

## Giving parents, families and whānau more information

Your school could provide parents, families and whānau with information in plain language on topics that they might find complex (such as the curriculum, assessment, or National Standards). This could be done through new entrant/starting school packs, meetings, the school website and newsletters.

More information about reporting to parents, families and whānau can be found on the Assessment website <http://assessment.tki.org.nz> and the parents section of the Ministry of Education website

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/Parents/YourChild/ProgressAndAchievement/NationalStandards/Introduction.aspx>